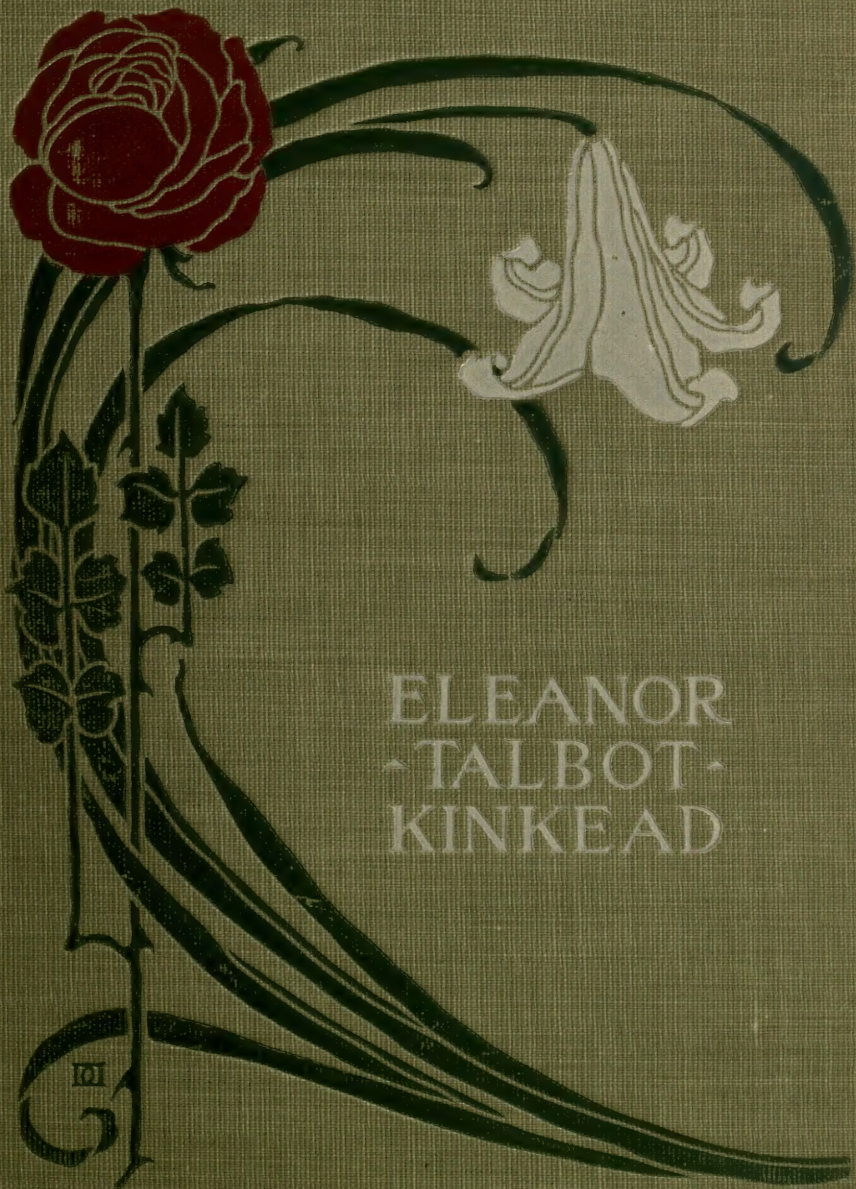



The Invisible Bond



ELEANOR
TALBOT
KINKEAD

20-14

Blanche Taynes.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

THE INVISIBLE BOND









THE INVISIBLE BOND

BY
ELEANOR TALBOT KINKEAD



NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY

1906

CONTENTS

PART I

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ROGER BOLLING	1
II. MARIAN DAY	11
III. MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED	29
IV. THE COTILLION	53
V. HEARTS ABEYANT	67
VI. GOOD-BY	80
VII. MARIAN'S SECRET	95
VIII. CIRCE	120
IX. THE AWAKENING	145
X. JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE	158
XI. COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART	176
XII. IN THE SHADOW	197
XIII. THE BAPTISM OF SORROW	209
XIV. THE SHADOW OF THE SECRET	226
XV. FOR HIS OATH'S SAKE	241

PART II

I. RED ROSES	257
II. THE LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY	267
III. A DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS	285
IV. THE FLIGHT	314
V. A LETTER	333
VI. THE UNEXPECTED	347
VII. IN WHICH ROGER COMES INTO HIS OWN	362
VIII. SIBYL	369
IX. THE INVISIBLE BOND	381
X. THE FATE OF FRANCIS WALLER	395
XI. IN WHICH TWO PERSONS RECEIVE A SHOCK	404
XII. AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE	413
XIII. THE GODS ARE JUST	436
XIV. ROGER AND SIBYL	453
XV. THE STOOP OF THE SOUL	466
XVI. TIME'S WHEEL	482
XVII. THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES	497

PART I

THE ROSE-MESH OF THE FLESH

THE INVISIBLE BOND

CHAPTER I

ROGER BOLLING

HE seemed a mere boy as he dashed into the waiting-room at the station — the incarnation of eager, untried youth, of boundless hope, and undaunted purpose; of that which made him of a part not only with the morning of life but with the very springtime of the world, the music of Pan, and the sweet mockery of illusion. He was notably tall and straight, of fine athletic build, with a hint of reserve force, moral as well as intellectual. Despite his gay good humor, he looked as if he might be serious enough on occasions, and one knew him at once for one of those acutely sensitive souls with whom feeling can seldom be less than profound and effort is almost invariably earnest. To-day happiness, strength, surety were stamped upon him as by an impress, though for the moment his smooth, dark face was flushed and appealingly contrite, and his manner betrayed the nervous haste of one who seeks to atone for an omission by an excess of alertness.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Simultaneously with his cyclonic entrance, his glance swept the room, and as a result of the comprehensive survey his expression quickly altered. He stood dumfounded and abashed. The place was wholly deserted. He caught in his breath, paled a little, and took a hurried step forward. What if she had come and — horrible thought — gone! He was a trifle late.

But, luckily, so was the train, he discovered upon inquiry of the sad-eyed young man at the little oval-shaped window in the corner, and there was a brief interrogation, the replies to which were highly reassuring. Roger Bolling's handsome countenance cleared. All at once he drew a deep sigh of satisfaction, threw back his head, and laughed aloud — a ringing, boyish laugh, assisted by a certain unconscious charm of manner that always made people want to be friends with him on the instant, and that seemed to invest with interest his simplest acts and movements. Then he made his way to the door opposite the one he had just entered, and emerged into the dazzling summer sunshine. Plainly he was very embryonic.

He had found that, instead of being fully three minutes behind time, he would have a good five minutes to wait, and that, far from proving himself delinquent to his trust, through a merciful intervention, he would be on hand to welcome the arrival as effectively, and, if need be, as effusively as if he had indeed been as

ROGER BOLLING

punctual as his sense of obligation and courtesy required. However, he was not one to find justification in fortuitous circumstance of a neglected act. He was taking himself soundly to task.

There were only a few persons at the station, and these, like himself, were evidently of the opinion that the breezy platform, bordered by well-kept flower beds, that stretched the length of the building and afforded a pleasant view of the Kentucky skies, was a more agreeable place than the close waiting-room, with the loud-ticking clock and the dejected clerk. He looked about him absently, his thoughts busy in self-condemnation.

But he admitted in a sort of half apology, and not without a flash of humorous appreciation, that the circumstances that led to his defection were unusual. He had been talking over a very important legal matter with a newly acquired client. And the subject had proved sufficiently engrossing to drive entirely from his mind all minor concerns. Certain it is that his services had been engaged by the queer old yeoman in baggy trousers and broad-brimmed hat who had entered his office a little more than an hour before for reasons peculiarly flattering. It was a tribute both to blood and to brains, and the young man had cause to congratulate himself, not only that he was a lineal descendant of old Roger Bolling, one of the most

THE INVISIBLE BOND

noted of a group of really great lawyers of a bygone day, but also that he himself had gained sufficient distinction during his nine months' practice at the Lexington bar to call forth the pleasing encomiums which the farmer had heaped upon him.

"I heerd you speakin' in the Co'te House long 'bout last April while that Simpkins murder case was on," the man had remarked affably and with a wink of approval as he shifted his quid of tobacco, "an' I sez to Hannah after I come home that night, I sez, 'When I seen him a-standin' up thar so tall an' slim, sassin' back at them other lawyers with his eyes a-blazin', I could almost believe that it was ole Roger Bolling himself come back to life again.' I wa'n't no more'n a little shaver, an' he wa'n't no more'n a lad like you when he appeared in that great case o' hisn with Henry Clay an' half a dozen other big guns on t'other side. But he give it to 'em, you mark my word, he give it to 'em! I sez to Hannah, I sez, 'The boy's got ole Roger Bolling's hawkbill nose an' eagle eye, an' he's just bound to knock them other fellows out,' an' I sez, 'If I git into trouble with that widdeh woman 'bout that lan' across the road, an' it looks powerful like I'm *a-goin'* to git into trouble with her, *whether* or no, ole Roger Bolling's grandson's the chap for me. I'll bet my head 'g'inst a bucket o' beans that thar ain't nary widdeh woman in the State o' Kentucky that

ROGER BOLLING

he ain't a match for. He ain't got that hawk-bill nose an' eagle eye for nothin', so that's the chap for me.'"

The old farmer's worst fears had been realized; he was in trouble with the "widdeh woman," and young Roger Bolling, somewhat disconcerted, it is true, by such high comparison and commendation, but not without a due sense of all that was to be expected of one whose hereditary and facial distinction was so pronounced, was throwing himself bravely into the breach. Had not the farmer finally brought the interview to a close, it may be doubted whether the ambitious fledgling of the law thus encouragingly appealed to would ever have been reminded of the promise he had made — which was to be at the station at the hour of eleven to receive a young woman who was that day to arrive as the guest of friends, but who, owing to a most unexpected complication of affairs, was in reality to become in the emergency his mother's guest and his own.

With a self-accusing pang he recalled Mrs. Caldwell's hurried words of lavish appreciation as the little woman stepped into the carriage that was to bear her to her train. "Really, Roger, it is just too good of your dear mother and yourself!" she had exclaimed all in a flutter as she clutched wildly at her glove in the effort to fasten it in spite of the resistance of a very plump wrist. "And it is *so* lovely of you both to try to make me feel that you do not regard it as an impo-

THE INVISIBLE BOND

sition.” And then she had added, her delightful little lisp especially noticeable as she leaned, breathless, out of the carriage window to bestow upon him a grateful wave of the hand and a hasty and somewhat bewildering description, “My dear boy, you just can’t fail to discover her; she is very striking, really *wonderful*! She is as beautiful as a statue in marble; only she is not like marble, because she always makes one feel that there is wine in her veins — or maybe it is fire, and she is tall and slim — not so *very* slim, of course, that is, she is not at all angular, and she is not *too* tall,” with a complacent lowering of the eyelids and an innocent downward glance at her own small, partridge-like person. “And she has curling red-brown hair — splendid hair — and she will have on a black gown, a little shabby, perhaps, and she will not be in the least awkward or shy.”

As he strode up and down the long platform at the station, hands in his pockets, head thrown back, face aglow, Roger Bolling devoutly hoped that at least in one particular Mrs. Caldwell’s summary would be supported by fact. He felt that he would not find it hard to forgive his prospective acquaintance if she should prove to be far from beautiful, if only she should show herself to be neither awkward nor shy. He was inclined to be a little ill at ease himself on occasions, and he was of the opinion that two persons in such

ROGER BOLLING

plight are not apt to render things very agreeable for either; and he did hate to feel that he was making any one uncomfortable, even when conscious of not being solely responsible. There was a very kindly gleam in the dark gray eyes despite their perspicacity. The old farmer's delineation had been drawn mainly from his recollection of certain pronounced ancestral peculiarities of aspect which had, it is true, in some degree descended. The "eagle eye" and the "hawk-bill nose" would not have been altogether misleading to one seeking to identify the young man. But Roger Bolling was the fortunate possessor of that particular order of good looks which wins easily, and from the outset, without, however, being able fully to substantiate its claim. He was something more than handsome. His personality was unique, and, notwithstanding the suggestion of immaturity, even distinguished. There was something patrician in the way the fine dark head was set on its shoulders; in his proud, firm step — in gracious keeping with the thorough modesty of his bearing. One knew him at once to be a man and a gentleman, with certain chivalrous and obsolete ideas which threw him out of his generation, and which through life would doubtless stamp him as intolerant among those to whom he should be something of a reproach. It was necessary to study him very closely to reconcile much that seemed

THE INVISIBLE BOND

contradictory. But a second glance was not needed to discover that he was impetuous, and to foresee much of the suffering that must inevitably befall him through that very quality, sustained always by an iron determination to meet existence upon the plane of a pure and lofty manhood.

There had been a refreshing shower in the early morning hours, but now, at eleven, the sun shone intensely brilliant, the more dazzling for its brief hiding. The air was like a cool and sparkling beverage, intoxicating to the senses. Roger Bolling drank it in with that keen and buoyant delight which belongs to those whose physical side is not only sound but still predominant. In his attitude and aspiration he belonged to the youth of the world, to the period of bounding, joyous physical and mental life, the spirit, that great mastering force in the trinity of being — the power which gives fineness of interpretation to the various human relations — being only rudimentally conceived in his yet undeveloped personality. He was gloriously happy, in spite of certain vaguely disturbing anticipations.

He could not have told himself as he looked down the gleaming car track toward the distant stretch of lovely bluegrass country why he dreaded this meeting with the unknown person he awaited. Yet he did dread it, he admitted, with a certain odd, uncomfortable

ROGER BOLLING

reluctance that he could not well define. He only knew that he wished heartily that the ordeal were over, and he pulled out his watch with an impatient jerk.

In the same instant there was a shriek from the engine half a mile away. Immediately a general movement took place among the subordinates about the station, and, as usual, inertness gave way to activity at the mere approach of progress. Porters, newsboys, omnibus drivers, who had been sleepily waiting the arrival of the train seemed instantly galvanized to their wonted energies. The place hummed with life. The dreary old woman surrounded by boxes and bundles began hastily to gather together her belongings. The commercial tourist rose and stretched his legs, throwing away his cigar with a shrug. Four or five laughing young girls off for a picnic with their masculine attendants and chaperoned by a pretty young matron in a light blue gingham gown and rose-wreathed hat, who dropped her final g's, came gaily down the platform, making no attempt by a lowering of their voices to exclude any who should care to listen to their light-hearted pleasantries.

Roger Bolling stood leaning against a post waiting with a nonchalance which, though well assumed, was scarcely an outward expression of an inward feeling. There was another long, shrill whistle that echoed far

THE INVISIBLE BOND

out into the Kentucky woodlands; and a moment later the engine with its immense train of cars came snorting and bellowing into the station like a great belated, balking beast, half ashamed of its stubbornness. He moved quickly forward.

CHAPTER II

MARIAN DAY

SHE was not in the last coach, and he was moving on to the next one when a voice spoke at his elbow — an extraordinary voice, smooth, controlled, and clear as a bell. It affected him strangely, and not altogether agreeably, in a way not unlike the impression produced upon his senses when on still summer nights he waked and counted the strokes of the great clock in a distant dome. There was in it a note of inevitableness that was at the same time both a summons and a challenge: a sort of serenity of power that could afford to proceed without haste, and that seemed to ally itself with things vast and irresistible, the might and the surety of destiny. It was without sweetness, yet it thrilled him with its concentrated energy and force of suggestion.

“This is Mr. Roger Bolling?” the voice was saying with a rising inflection, but with conviction.

He turned quickly and with an alert and responsive movement peculiar to him. But as he lifted his hat

THE INVISIBLE BOND

the look of courteous inquiry on his features altered abruptly, just as if a flame had been suddenly swept before his eyes. He stood quite still, and, for the moment, it did not occur to him to make a reply. But in the midst of the confusion that seemed to render him temporarily dumb he realized that the detailed description that had been given him had not been heeded for nought.

The woman before him was tall and of exquisitely rounded proportions; and she seemed to him as beautiful as his imagination pictured Helen — the type of the ages — and quite as mature. There was something dazzling and intensely potent in her personality, and Mrs. Caldwell's crudely contradictory though graphic comparison seized hold of him: "She is like marble, only she is not like marble because she always makes one feel there is wine in her veins — maybe fire."

"It is Mr. Bolling?" she repeated.

Her lips, half insolent in expression, parted, as his eyes met hers, in a slow, peculiar smile, and there was a certain hard brilliancy in the flash of her white, even teeth. Her features were intelligent, yet they made the same impression upon him as her voice, which both repelled and lured him. He could not account for his involuntary withholding: it was impossible he should know that it was in truth but the instinctive

M A R I A N D A Y

recoil of the spirit from the rose-mesh of the flesh, from that which, with ancient, savage strength, men in all generations have fought and bled and died for, and for which they have been willing to barter name and fame, and sometimes even honor itself.

The young man pulled himself together and rose valiantly to the occasion. She was too completely at her ease to allow him any excuse for awkwardness, though he was finding her self-sufficiency even more disconcerting than any shyness on her part could have been.

"It is, and you are Miss Day, of course," he cried in cordial response, holding out his hand to her with a suddenly kind-hearted impulse. His eyes had fallen upon her shabby gown and worn gloves.

"I am Miss Day," she answered, carelessly, turning her head slightly to one side while she secured a hat pin that was slipping from its place; and his gaze, following the action, rested upon her hair and became entangled in it. It was quite remarkable hair, as remarkable as Mrs. Caldwell had described, of a shade that was doubtless a distinct auburn in shadow, but now, in the sunlight, shone aureate, and thick and tawny as a lion's mane, with delightful little stray locks and wandering curls that would have been at variance with a contour bordering upon the severely classical but for the full red lips.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"I thought you were looking for some one," she added, with a laugh and a shrug, "and it occurred to me that I might be the one you wanted."

There was a happy-go-lucky way with her, a sort of Bohemian nonchalance that struck him as very odd indeed; and there was even a hint of condescension in her self-possession.

"You are — you are indeed the one I want," he answered, slightly flushed and disconcerted. "But how on earth were you able to pick me out of this motley throng with such unerring wisdom? Have I got Roger Bolling written all over me?"

She stood looking at him, as the crowd surged to and fro, with a cool and somewhat critical survey. It seemed to render her wholly oblivious to the steady tramp of hurrying feet, the confusing hum of greetings and farewells, and the clamorous appeals of cabmen and omnibus drivers mingling with the spasmodic shrieks of an engine as it switched near by. She did not reply at once; and again she smiled softly, secretly, as to herself, the smile of a woman who knows her power, yet scarcely thinks it worth her while to exert it.

"I got a telegram on the train from Mrs. Caldwell saying you would meet me," she said, at length, without deigning to enlighten him further. "But I might ask the same sort of question of you. It was really very clever of you — or of Mrs. Caldwell. But

MARIAN DAY

I have never attributed to her special gifts in the line of description, so it must have been due to your own powers of discrimination, after all. What was the matter with her? Couldn't she get ready on time? Was it just a little too much for her — as usual?"

Something in her reference to her friend, the attempt to establish a kind of mutual understanding between them regarding Mrs. Caldwell's deficiencies and foibles, jarred upon his good-breeding.

"No — yes — that is, I mean I am sure she would have been ready on time," he responded, loyally, though not without a momentary misgiving for the effect upon her of his needless prevarication. "However, she was suddenly called away. She was awfully cut up about it, I hope you will believe."

He gave a short glance around, accompanied by the swift, stag-like movement of the head that had caught her eye the instant she stepped from the train. Then he moved back.

"But I am keeping you here standing in this scorching sun," he supplemented, quickly, and in the masterful tone of a man accustomed to look somewhat dogmatically after a woman's small comforts. "The trap is waiting just back of the station. Let me take you to it. I will come back and give directions about your luggage. And I shall have to countermand your orders."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Her brows arched in bewilderment, but without a word she handed him her trunk checks and followed him as he made a way for her through the crowd, her indifference and languor oddly offset by his eager courtesy and intense nervous energy.

He returned quickly and immediately plunged into explanation.

"You see it was this way," he volunteered, as he got in on the far side of Mrs. Caldwell's gaily painted little vehicle and tossed a coin, with a kindliness that was at the same time lordly and debonair, to the small darky who had been holding his horse for him, "it was this way. Several days ago Mr. Caldwell was summoned in haste to a brother living in Frankfort who has been extremely ill, and who is now at the point of death, I'm thinking. At all events, he has grown very much worse, and this morning Mrs. Caldwell also was sent for. She thought of telegraphing and asking you not to come, but afterwards concluded that most likely things were not so bad, after all, and that 'Tim,' as she calls Mr. Caldwell, just wanted to see her. She had a brief but entirely satisfactory conference by telephone with my mother, and then she sent for your humble servant. We are the Caldwells' very good friends, my mother and I, and we live next door to them. So Mrs. Caldwell has handed you over to us for safe-keeping, and we feel ourselves very much honored, I assure you."

M A R I A N D A Y

She gave him a quick, penetrating glance of startled inquiry that seemed to be surprised from her against her will, for her eyes were lowered instantly. But not before a strange look had leaped from under the half-closed lids, the look of a tigress about to be robbed of her prey. Yet it vanished so speedily one might easily have been persuaded it had never been there.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, under her breath, “oh, I understand.”

For a moment she was silent and abstracted, thinking intently, and he hesitated to break in upon her, supposing that she was troubled for her friends.

But all at once there took place some subtle change in her mental attitude which expressed itself in an air of unexpected animation — a warm responsiveness of demeanor which hitherto her manner had wholly lacked. She roused herself and looked about her as for the first time, noting with a shrewd and calculating astuteness the wide, comfortable homes they were passing, the trim equipages, the shadowy streets — all the quaint beauty and jarring uglinesses, conglomerate and detached, of the old Southern town. And then, under the sudden stimulus of a situation which she had just become alive to, and which was likely to give a very different turn to her visit from what she had anticipated, her gaze once more traveled back to the young man at her side and rested upon him in an

THE INVISIBLE BOND

expression that was daringly tentative but at the same time vigilant.

He looked up and met her eyes, and a wave of youthful self-consciousness swept over him. He spoke quickly and in a sort of uncertainty.

"I hope you will try to feel quite at home with us," he said, with a wholesome, naïve cheerfulness of tone that sought merely to put her in good humor with himself and everything that should be before her.

"But what an imposition!" she cried, with an elevation of the eyebrows and a slow wonderment in her prolonged stare that was in truth less a protest than a call to arms. "Am I actually to be a trespasser upon your bounty? How beneficent! You know I may have to make my abode with you for days and days," she added in a very low voice.

"That's Kentucky hospitality. Did you never hear of it?" asked Roger Bolling.

"Very often," she retorted, with ready coquetry. "I have even heard of the man who came to make a visit of two weeks and stayed twenty years."

His laugh rang out. "Wasn't it immense? But his was not an isolated case, I beg you to believe. I could tell you of dozens of ante-bellum tales of a similar description. They surely were a jolly set, those old gentlefolk of a generation ago."

"This may be a modern instance," she persisted,

MARIAN DAY

coolly. But before he could answer she reverted to the subject that, like a deep undertone, had been sounding for her through their banter until she could give heed to only it.

"Is it really so serious, do you think, this illness of Mr. Caldwell's brother?" she asked.

His handsome face clouded. "I'm afraid it is serious," he answered, "though Mrs. Caldwell did not seem to fear the worst. But she went off in such a rush she had scarcely time to think. I never saw a man more grieved than poor old Tim was on the day he left. It's his favorite brother, you know. We were all very much disturbed for him. Mrs. Caldwell also is very fond of him — of the brother, I mean. You know she is just the kindest hearted little woman in the whole world."

"Oh, yes," she said, absently.

Again something in her tone puzzled him. He looked up inquiringly, but she gave him no clue, and he said with gay insouciance:

"You haven't yet told me how you happened to guess my name and my errand at the station. Are you in possession of some sort of secret power that makes the hidden plain to you?"

Marian Day roused herself as with an effort, but there was a characteristic audacity in the reply she flashed back at him and in her radiant smile.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Possessed of a devil, do you mean, like the slave girl of Biblical fame? I am not sure."

He waited, vaguely conscious of something withheld, her teasing allurements reflecting itself upon his countenance in only a puzzled amusement.

"I had seen you before," she said, presently.

"Really? But when? I am sure I should not have forgotten."

A half bored look came into her eyes. "I meant of course a picture of you," she responded, carelessly, turning away from him and directing her attention to the crowded street. "Mrs. Caldwell had a photograph with her last winter in Louisville on a very memorable occasion when she invited me in from my country school to spend from Friday to Monday with her at her hotel and go to the opera. You can't think how it delighted me."

"The picture or the opera?" he asked, gravely.

"To be perfectly frank with you — both."

He tipped his hat to her as his laughing eyes met hers.

"I am not used to having bouquets hurled at me like that, Miss Day; you must pardon me if I don't know how to make the right response."

She bit her lip. "That's because you are such an infant," she answered, a trifle irritably.

"An infant, am I? Well, when a fellow gets to be an old man of nearly eight-and-twenty —"

M A R I A N D A Y

"Oh, but you are not twenty-eight," she said, shortly.

"I will show you the family Bible."

She turned and looked him full in the eyes. "You don't mean that you are actually —"

"I am actually. Already I feel the signs of old age approaching. I was something of an athlete in my day."

It was evident that she was completely taken by surprise. "A boy — a mere boy, even younger than his picture!" had been her mental comment at the station, and she had been quite sure, after further conversation, that he could not be more than twenty-two or twenty-three at the utmost. She herself was a little under twenty-nine.

When she spoke again it was with a more subtle exertion of her charm and a greater soberness of expression, a flattering deference that for the first time was manifest in the various gradations of acquaintance through which they had passed.

"It was mainly for the sake of what it stood for," she said, a little sadly, at length. "Good-looking young men, gentlemen, in my present experience are rare. Mrs. Caldwell brought the photograph with her because she wanted to see if I did not think you something like a man we both met last summer at a little resort where I first knew her. There was not much

THE INVISIBLE BOND

resemblance, I thought, except of a very superficial kind, for you are so powerful, so strong, and he — he was dying of consumption.”

There was not the smallest tremor in her voice, but his face softened sympathetically and rather suggestively. Noting the look, she said, quickly:

“The man did not interest me in the least. It was not merely because disease and suffering are things that almost invariably produce in me a sense of irritation, if not of positive animosity. It was not just that, although that cough of his was simply maddening. It was the realization that he was one of those sensitive, uncertain souls who are always waiting for some sort of divine assurance before they will enter upon any kind of work, and who fail not from lack of ability but from sheer procrastination.”

There was a sudden vehemence in her manner, and a deliberate attempt at a revelation of herself that was plainly intended to draw him out; but he was silent, and she went on more quietly.

“The dice of the gods may be busy with his fate, and it is useless to struggle when once the final throw has been cast; nevertheless, the man who courts success in this day and generation hasn’t time to wait until he is called, you may be sure. He simply sees the plum of opportunity, makes a leap for it, grasps it, if possible, and is off and away with it before others have even

MARIAN DAY

suspected it is there. This is not an age when people can afford to wait for 'leadin's,' as they say down in the country."

For a moment he did not answer. Then he leaned forward and touched the horse lightly with the whip. His face had grown thoughtful, taking on a gravity that made him suddenly look his age.

"I believe that Opportunity knocks not only once but many times at every man's door," he replied presently, with conviction. "The difference in men is in the capacity of discernment — keenness of vision — strength of heart and brawn and brain to know and seize hold of the waiting guest, and then to constrain him with all the civility and all the might that may be necessary to come in, instead of slamming the door in his face, as very many of us often do. In that case, of course, no great harm is done except to ourselves. Opportunity passes on to the next one, and the world's work manages to get itself done somehow, and in even a better way perhaps than if we had had a hand in it. Only it doesn't mean that there is any just quarrel with Opportunity."

She flashed a swift, brilliant smile upon him.

"Oh, I like that — I like it!" she exclaimed, softly. "It thrills me through and through. It means that you are in dead earnest and that you are one of the men that will surely do things."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

He laughed. "With a proper degree of discrimination I hope I will," he replied, half in jest, half in earnest. Then his face suddenly grew grave again.

"But as for the rest of what you say, that about being called, you know, well, I am perfectly sure that there is a distinct something that every human being is divinely appointed to do in this world, whether it be the particular thing he should prefer to do or not; and I only know that if a fellow isn't conscious of some sort of 'leadin's' — if you will lend me your word — as he goes about the choice of his life work, the day is not very far distant when he will begin to find himself somewhat in the situation King Arthur predicted for his knights, 'following wandering fires, lost in the quagmire.'"

He spoke simply, modestly, in a tone of seriousness he had not before used with her, and she studied him with a growing interest, attracted not by the ethical in him which she was beginning to discern, and which as a matter of fact she cared nothing for, but by a certain inherent strength she saw in him which seemed to her to make him a being worth while.

"After all, I am not sure that we don't both mean about the same thing," she said. "It is power that I care for in a man, power, always power, that tremendous, onswEEPing energy that can drive things before it like a mighty wind, the great lever, the irresistible

MARIAN DAY

force, the unconquerable element — that moves the world and will continue to move it until the very end of all things. It matters little to me in what it finds its source, what it draws on for its strength —”

He met her gaze with the utmost candor.

“Isn’t that rather pagan?” he asked, smiling.

“Perhaps it is. But there is something pagan — barbaric, if you will, about me. Haven’t you discovered it?”

“I begin to think I have,” he responded, with hypocritical staidness.

She turned toward him quickly, and her voice was low and tense, thrilling with passionate feeling and intimate personal appeal.

“Mediocrity is something I loathe,” she said. “A man should either be a magnificent success or a colossal failure. There is no possible middle ground for one who is worthy of the name. He should fall from a great height, if he must fall at all; and to please me he must be a superb exponent of those great primal forces that were at work in the race when feeling was powerful and paramount, and when ambition and love flew to their objects straight as an arrow to its goal. In other words, he should strive hard, love fiercely, and drink deep of the wine of life.”

She threw him a sidelong glance winged with coquetry, and with infinite flattery and suggestion. But

THE INVISIBLE BOND

he only laughed back gaily, and retorted lightly; his manner still remained boyishly frank. It was evident she was not turning his head. Her eyes narrowed and she looked away.

As a matter of fact he found it difficult to go below the surface with her, and the intensity of reserve that lay beneath his outward cordiality raised a barrier that distinctly repelled her as she approached the confines of the personal. Though her beauty had for an instant startled and bewildered him, intoxicating him almost like a sip from some magic draught, he had soon recovered his senses, and she had been unable to do more than provoke in him a mild curiosity concerning her, without rousing his imagination or compelling him to anything like the response she had deliberately aimed to call forth.

He was not at all sure that he admired her, though he was beginning to be a little sorry for her; and pity, even when it was a long way off from compassion, was dangerous ground for him always. She gave him the impression, despite her dash and her defiance, of having had, as he inwardly expressed it, "a pretty rough time of it on the journey of life," and there was a chivalry in his nature that shrank from the thought of hardship to a woman. She was a new type to him, and his experience had not been varied. He only knew that, during her brief stay under his mother's

MARIAN DAY

roof, he meant to be everything that was kind to her, and he felt it might be possible for them, his mother and himself, in some measure to atone to her for her very natural disappointment on account of her friend's absence.

He could not refrain as they drove along from an occasional speculation as to what his mother probably would think of her — his lovely, high-bred mother with her smooth ways and somewhat hypercritical demands, particularly with regard to young women. He recalled that he had once heard her say that she considered the well-born Kentucky girl a most beautiful and graceful and dignified representative of the aristocratic class. But it went through him with the poignancy of an acute reminder that in that moment she was speaking of Sibyl Fontaine. What would she think of Miss Day?

He asked himself that question in vain, being by no means blind to the crudities, the lack of fineness and of an enlightenment that was spiritual as well as social, in the strange guest she should have to entertain. He took another furtive glance at the clean-cut profile beside him, and then looked quickly away in a sort of unconscious apology. No, he was not at all sure he admired her. All at once his face changed.

In the same instant Marian Day was aware that he gave a quick, nervous start, and that his whole frame

THE INVISIBLE BOND

was suddenly quivering under an intensity of excitement as from an electric shock. In his eyes there was a look that she had been wholly unable to call there, a look of dumb, reverent admiration.

She pricked up her ears and glanced around, and as she did so, in the crowded street an open carriage passed, its wheels almost grazing against their own.

A black-haired young woman, dressed in white, very beautiful, and with something rare and indefinable in look and bearing, was alone in the carriage; and Roger Bolling was in the act of making his best bow to her.

The girl flushed a little as she met the young man's eyes, but there was a poise, a picturesque reserve in her gracious courtesy that seemed to mark her peculiarly as belonging to an order, and that cut Marian Day like a reproof.

In that brief glance she had seen everything: the beauty, the distinction, the fine, intangible dignity which sat like a crown upon the small head, surrounding it with something as delicate yet as real as a bridal veil. She was, moreover, as definitely conscious of the effect of it all upon the young man as if reading his very thoughts. A swift change passed over her features, and her lips curled in a shrewdly subtle smile.

"Ah, that's the girl!" she commented, mentally.

CHAPTER III

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

IN a low, square room, modest in appointments, yet cool and restful to the eye, with white linen coverings and airy draperies, and interesting on account of a certain fineness of selection in the way of water-color or etching, or a stray volume here and there, a graceful middle-aged woman was sitting absently cutting the pages of a magazine.

It was too late to read comfortably, even outside, had her mood permitted it, and within, the room was in deep shadow, owing to the obstruction of a wide porch curtained with vines that ran the full length of the building, thus gratefully, in the earlier hours, intercepting the glare and imparting at all times a delicious bower-like look to the abode that made it a spot on which the eye of the passer-by invariably lingered. The house was of a quaint, cottage style, mainly of one story, with an old-fashioned doorway and windows that reached down to the floor, opening inward like small double-doors. All of these had been

THE INVISIBLE BOND

flung wide, and the twilight air, sweet with flowers, came floating in as a welcome guest.

Mrs. Bolling held the little mother-of-pearl paper knife daintily between the tips of her fingers as she slowly cut the leaves. In spite of her preoccupation and somewhat troubled air there was a precision in the evenness of the recurring movement that was suggestive of an inherent quality. One would have made sure that her grasp upon herself was well-nigh perfect, and also that this self-poise had been acquired not merely through a regard for conventionality, which assuredly she was by no means disposed to neglect, but as a result of a long discipline of life that had led her up through years of trial to the serene mountain heights where she breathed the pure air of a sweet and patient subjection. The expression of her features was mild and pensive, in marked contrast with the intense, ardent questioning, the unabashed hope, the vastness of longing and of purpose, that looked forth with such passionate insistence from her son's eyes.

She wore a very simple dinner gown of black lawn, cut surplice, and somewhat severely made, but she gave an impression of completeness and of elegance, and her white throat rose above the smooth folds across her ample breast firm and beautiful. She had grown a trifle too stout, but she was tall, and her figure had not lost its suppleness. Her light-brown

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

hair, streaked with gray, was still abundant, and her complexion was fresh and rosy as a child's.

In the room beyond the cloth was spread for dinner, and a negro man-servant was moving softly to and fro. Presently he began to light the candles, and Mrs. Bolling in her deep chair near the window looked up with a start as the soft glow from the tall silver candelabra flooded the space around. Despite the polished calm of her manner, her glance wandered with distinct anxiety to the doorway, and her breath came a trifle hurried and uneven.

For Marian Day's abrupt and dazzling entrance that morning into the placidity of her home life had been not unlike the shock to the senses produced by a thunder-bolt hurled from a peaceful sky. It had come nearer costing her the loss of her equanimity than any experience that had befallen her in recent years. The thought of it and of what this visit possibly might lead up to had got upon her nerves and taken hold of her in a way that was painfully persistent; so that she was filled with forebodings, and most uncomfortably distraught as she bent her head thoughtfully over the magazine. She dallied for a moment longer, the paper knife moving less regularly.

She had reached the last page. "James, tell Miss Day that dinner is served," she said, noting that the negro lingered idle about the table.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"She comin' now, Miss Sophie," replied the man with a grin, as he whisked an imperceptible bit of dust from one of the high-backed chairs. "She been out in de gyardin, an' she got her han's full."

Just as the man ceased speaking there was a rustle in the hall as of garments trailing in the direction of the drawing-room, the sound being accompanied by a suppressed, pantherish sort of tread that sent an involuntary shiver through the waiting lady. A moment later Marian appeared in the doorway. She was smiling softly.

She stood quite still for an instant, like one who has deliberately planned an effect, and her glance traversed the apartment with the swiftness of a wind-swept flame. Suddenly her expression changed. A quickly assumed nonchalance took the place of the radiant self-possession that had preceded it, and she spoke familiarly, with even a note of impatience in her clear treble, as if suddenly jarred upon in some way, and grown conscious.

"How can you leave all these roses out there to blush unseen, Mrs. Bolling?" she cried. "It positively hurts me. In another day they will be beginning to fall. But I have rescued a few from obscurity — that most galling of conditions. Don't you want them for your dinner table?"

She held out the huge bunch of flowers she had just

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

gathered and then dropped it with a careless gesture as soon as she had reached the center of the room, apparently forgetful of having an instant before directed attention to it.

Mrs. Bolling rose graciously, though slightly taken by surprise. In spite of her rare tact and knowledge of the world she had been from the very outset not a little disconcerted by a guest whose strange lack of ceremony offered a contrast to her own formality sufficiently pronounced to make her feel their relative positions to be reversed, and she herself the one received and not the one receiving. Not that Marian did not attempt to put her at her ease. She had entered the house with all the air of one long expected, and she had made known her intention at once of accepting the cordial invitation that had been extended to make herself quite at home in it. The elder woman glanced a little helplessly at the great nosegay on the table before her.

“Oh! — ah, of course, my dear — I shall be charmed,” she said, quickly. “James, take them and put them in water,” she commanded in an aside. “I believe there will not be room for any more on the dinner table,” she explained, while Marian, with the detachment of utter indifference, stood watching the negro as he gathered the roses up. “James has his orders to keep us well supplied,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

but I am sure he will find a place for these. How very good of you! I hope you did not prick your fingers?"

"I found some scissors in my trunk, and I never expect my roses to be without thorns. As a rule, I have had the thorns without the roses," replied Marian Day, taking a photograph from the table and coolly examining it, her glance sweeping the unfamiliar features with the swift and penetrating inquiry she had bestowed upon the little domicile and all that it contained on entering it seven or eight hours before. Mrs. Bolling was morally certain that that same acumen had counted every one of her gray hairs, and that Miss Day was as cognizant as she was of their recently restricted income.

At luncheon the situation had been distinctly strained, notwithstanding Roger's light-hearted pleasantries, his ready flow of conversation, and his attitude — slightly reassuring to her motherly alarms — of kindly but unensnared protection. Mrs. Bolling's sense of propriety, which was of a delicacy unusual enough to be commented upon, forbade, even with her son, any discussion of a guest to whom their shelter had been thus afforded; but she had watched the two with a veiled disquiet beneath her exquisite refinement and courtesy and patrician calm, and she was by no means disposed to cavil at the circumstance which had

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

temporarily at least removed from danger the object of her fears.

Presently Marian raised her head and tossed the photograph aside, and Mrs. Bolling, who had been obligingly waiting, moved forward. She had caught the hard little note in the girl's voice, and it had set her to wondering. Mrs. Caldwell had been able to tell her so little.

"We are to dine alone, you and I," she said, affably, but with a covert glance that her smooth and kindly urbanity did not forbid. "My son has an engagement, to his regret, he asked me to say — one that he could not cancel. He wished me to make his apologies to you."

If this announcement caused her any dissatisfaction Marian Day was far too clever to reveal it. She merely nodded and made no comment, and the two seated themselves at the table.

But as the light of the waxen candles fell upon the silent and half disdainful figure at her side, Mrs. Bolling's heart gave a quick throb of nervous apprehension, and she was startled anew into an unwilling acknowledgment of the alluring power of the girl's ripe and dazzling beauty, and of her insolent charm. For beneath that lovely marble-like exterior she had seen what Mrs. Caldwell's flightiness and Roger's inexperience had failed to discern, and, before its

THE INVISIBLE BOND

momentary quiescence, she trembled, as if suddenly brought into contact with the sleeping passion of the jungle.

Marian was dressed with a certain regard for a classic suggestion, and her white gown of a silky gauze, cut a little low at the throat and secured slightly above the waist line by a slender golden girdle, was soft and sheeny and clinging, and fell sheer as gossamer about her shapely limbs. Her hair was loosely arranged in a Psyche knot at the back, and it rippled and rioted away from her white brow, and formed itself into countless little curls and twists here and there in a manner that was truly bewitching.

Mrs. Bolling found herself not a little disturbed by an evident effort to please which, she knew intuitively, was not directed mainly toward herself; and she was discreetly on the alert, recalling the look on the girl's face when her eyes swept the room a moment before.

"You should always wear white, my dear," she remarked in her gently patronizing way, and with a hurried second glance that was decorously questioning. "It is wonderfully becoming to you. I think one reason why our Southern girls make so many conquests over their Northern sisters is because they recognize the attractiveness of simplicity in dress — to men at least."

Marian flinched, and looked quickly into the pleasant

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

face turned toward her. She was by no means reassured, despite its complaisance.

"I think some of us are driven to that discovery by a force even more compelling than the desire for masculine approval," she responded, dryly, with a low chime of laughter that blended with the chilliness of her tone like the music of sleigh bells making a hard silvery obligato to the accompanying sound of the frozen earth as the runners glide over it. Her lashes were downcast, and there had come a dull red in her cheeks as if kindled by some secret inward fire. It altered her strangely.

Mrs. Bolling was conscious of the stirring of a revolt that might be capable under stress of developing into open rebellion.

"Then it is necessity, is it? — who it seems is not only the mother of invention but also of good taste?" she asked, smiling, as the soup was placed before them.

"Rather, a woful progeny of dowdies exhibiting every variety of clumsy makeshift," the girl flung back. Then a sudden audacity leaped into her eyes; and a sort of dare-devil spirit provoked by the consciousness of being disapproved of, which something, despite the careful courtesy of the other, had made her most irritatingly alive to, drove her to touch upon the very subject which, for cogent reasons of her own, she most wished to avoid.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"But I am not all Southern," she said, "as you supposed. My father was what in Virginia was always described as a Yankee. He came from Vermont."

She had no sooner spoken than she regretted it. Mrs. Bolling was interested at once, and hopeful, with the Kentuckian's inborn love of pedigree, of establishing an agreeable basis of conversation.

"Oh, indeed!" she exclaimed. "But your mother was a Virginian? In what part of the state did you live? We have many relatives in Virginia, Roger and I."

There was an instant's hesitation, and Mrs. Bolling waited patiently. The delay was barely perceptible, yet it did not pass unnoticed.

All at once Marian slowly, and with a shade of defiance in her aspect, raised her head and looked her hostess in the eyes.

"We lived in Richmond," she said.

"In Richmond? Then you must know a great many persons with whom we are acquainted. Do you recall —" and she was about to go over a list of familiar names when Marian cut in coldly, but with seeming carelessness.

"Oh, but we were quite unimportant," she declared. "I believe we did trace back, somewhere on a line of my mother's, to a Fairfax, or some one else, after skipping over a great many nobodies in between."

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

However, it doesn't matter. My father was a ne'er-do-weel, and my mother never knew anything but hardship and privation all the days of her life — with him. If it takes four generations to bring the individual up from poverty to the highest grade of gentility, the process can be reversed with half the number."

Mrs. Bolling was perplexed. A vague suspicion, too shadowy indeed to be called anything so definite, was beginning to be awakened in her by the intimation of an attitude of concealment, which one less observant might readily have failed to perceive, but which to Mrs. Bolling was evident despite Marian's undaunted candor. She believed that it had nothing whatever to do with a desire to withhold from her the fact of humble birth.

"You don't think it is a question of money, do you?" she asked, a trifle distantly. "Think of the fine old families in Kentucky and Virginia whose fortunes are lost to them, but who, nevertheless, have never surrendered an iota of their gentility or of their tradition, or of their position! There are some things that one need never lose."

She caught herself up, suddenly recollecting that her guest was an acknowledged nobody. "And yet — a Fairfax?" she asked herself wonderingly. It was difficult to believe that one could have in one's veins even a far-off strain of high-breeding and not be

THE INVISIBLE BOND

rescued from such raw inelegances, such a total lack of everything that to her mind constituted the lady of quality, as was manifest in Marian Day. She felt sure that there must be some mistake, that it must have been — “some one else.”

“If it is not a question of money, I am sure I don’t know what it is a question of,” observed Marian, with a shrug, and in a tone of obvious relief.

Mrs. Bolling studied the pattern of the table-cloth attentively. She was smiling when she spoke, but her tone was more formal than it yet had been.

“Upon that principle, Miss Day,” she replied, “the number of gentlemen in the South would be small indeed.”

James had removed the fish, and Marian’s gaze was wandering a little absently about the room. Under all her bold speech her thoughts were thrumming a monotone. And Roger Bolling’s face, young, ardent, and still undespoiled of its supremest charm — its divine faith in all high and noble things, its passionate purity, seemed to look at her across the blur of the pink wax candles with an expression half pleading in the eager eyes. She did not reply directly to Mrs. Bolling’s remark, but, with a strange fitful gleam darting from under her half closed lids, she folded her hands in her lap and laughed softly to herself, the laughter of a Lorelei, who sees her victim swimming

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

toward her in the foam. Then she turned quickly, fingering the delicate spiral of her glass.

"You spoke of tradition," she said, deliberately playing with the subject as a cat with a mouse, one moment releasing it, and then making a dash for it and shaking it a little viciously between her white teeth. "But tradition of what, if not of gold lace and former splendors? I should like to have a little of the gold lace myself. Small comfort it would be to me to know it had adorned my ancestors when I myself have to go in rags. When I am married —" she paused a moment, and then her lips parted in a swift, daring smile of infinite coquetry and complexity and confidence in self — "when I am married, it will be, I hope, to a man who can give me something more substantial than a dingy name reflecting feebly the fading glories of the past. After all, the pride of the Kentuckian and the Virginian resolves itself down to a very simple thing — the thing of dollars and cents, his ancestors' dollars and cents, I mean."

"Has it never occurred to you that it might be based, for instance, upon noble deeds, service to one's country, hereditary instincts of honor and refinement?" inquired Mrs. Bolling, with suave hostility.

Marian laughed again softly. Her expression had taken on a peculiar exhilaration. The swimmer was surely coming to her in the dark, fighting the waves

THE INVISIBLE BOND

with his strong young arms. It would be only a question of time. She could easily make him forget that other girl, here, under the same roof with him. And before the very eyes of his proud mother she would prove her power. The thought sent a wild thrill through her. The fact of opposition only lent a piquant zest to a situation which was indeed scarcely one she would have chosen, but which, nevertheless, was not without its possibilities and its own peculiar charm.

"Noble deeds are best remembered," she said, "when rewarded by valuable land grants and important official place, as was the case surely with many of your distinguished early Kentuckians. You see I am up on your history; it is my misfortune to teach it five months out of every year in a school down in Jefferson County."

Mrs. Bolling changed the subject mildly but firmly.

"Do you not find it very dull in the country in the winter? Or are you too absorbed in your teaching — except in the case of Kentucky history — to mind?"

She broke off with a perfunctory smile; the question seemed almost ludicrously inapt addressed to a woman of the dazzling, dashing type that Marian seemed to her to be; and the sense of mystery deepened. But Marian's manner had taken on the utmost of frankness; or of assurance.

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

"Dull!" she echoed. "It would be like applying the word to purgatorial fires to call it that — just that. And it all simply represents to me a means of livelihood, not the 'holy and honorable and delightful calling' that the candidates for superintendent always tell us it is. I am not inspired by anything grand or heroic, and I am not of the stuff that martyrs are made. I should object strongly to burning at the stake; but sometimes I have felt tempted to set fire to the school-house. When the end of the last term was reached I felt that if there were to be another day, another hour of such torture I should have committed suicide. It is a rather melodramatic way of making one's exit, to be sure. But it has its advantages. I went immediately after school closed to a friend living in the suburbs of Cincinnati. The visit meant to me what the few weeks meant that I spent last summer in the Kentucky mountains, where I met Mrs. Caldwell. It just saved my life, that is all. But even yet I can't think of that school without a shudder."

Mrs. Bolling's face softened. "Is it really so dreadful, my dear?" she asked, sympathetically.

"It really is," said Marian, with sudden nonchalance.

James set plates of chicken salad in crisp lettuce leaves before them and went off for beaten biscuits.

Marian leaned toward her hostess. "It is simply devilish, Mrs. Bolling," she declared. "Teaching is

THE INVISIBLE BOND

a device of Lucifer designed as a torment. But I dared not express myself quite so strongly before that servant of yours for fear he should think, from my intimate acquaintance with satanic methods, you were entertaining an angel of darkness instead of an angel of light."

Mrs. Bolling's eyes were pitiful, but she was thinking, however, not only of the unhappy young woman forced thus reluctantly to earn her bread, but also of the unfortunates under her charge.

"I trust that your visit to Lexington will be pleasant and restful to you," she said, at length, both repelled and touched. "Mrs. Caldwell is very gay; she will be able to do a great deal to enliven you, that is — if nothing should interfere."

"If Mr. Caldwell's brother doesn't die, most inopportunately? But he will, of course; it will be just my luck."

"I am afraid there is little hope for him."

Mrs. Bolling grew suddenly distant, and Marian looked up fiercely. But there came a swift alteration, and her whole being all at once voiced an appeal.

"You are thinking me heartless!" she cried in a tone that was both hurt and contrite. "But oh, you don't, it is impossible you should understand, *you* could never understand how I have looked forward to this visit, and now just as it had seemed to come to me —"

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

She broke off and then went on with a little gasp. "My life has been, still is, harder than anything you could imagine. Before my mother's death I taught a country school in Indiana. We were barely able to exist."

"You are — you are now quite alone?" asked Mrs. Bolling, very gently.

"I am entirely without encumbrances," replied Marian, with one of her sudden, flashing smiles.

The quickness of the transition, the complete change in voice and manner, was something to take one's breath away. Again Mrs. Bolling changed the subject abruptly.

"Roger has gone this evening to the hotel to dine with a friend, a distinguished author who has been visiting here. No doubt you have read some of his writings, and you must have heard Mrs. Caldwell speak of him. His name is Waller, Francis Waller."

There was an instant's intense stillness. Marian sat motionless. A slow tide of crimson had mounted to her brow, but it receded, leaving her strangely white and still.

"I have heard of him," she replied, with downcast eyes.

"He has been staying recently with the Caldwells, and would have remained longer, I believe, but for the circumstances. We have seen quite a good deal of

THE INVISIBLE BOND

him. Of course Roger asked him here this evening, but he insisted that, as he was leaving to-night for the East, the other way would be more convenient."

Marian started violently. And had Mrs. Bolling looked up she would have seen that same swift look, flashed from beneath the lowered lids, that, for the briefest possible space, Roger had caught sight of on the drive from the station when he told her of the unexpected turn of affairs — the look of some savage thing suddenly thwarted in its desire.

But Mrs. Bolling was preoccupied. A bowl of frozen cream had just been placed before her, and she was concerned with serving it.

"After the train leaves Roger will go to the cotillion," she said, her thoughts, with customary maternal absorption, wandering away to her son. "Do you care for dancing?"

"Immensely," replied Marian, coolly. She had quite recovered herself. "Not that I have much opportunity of indulgence in that line."

Mrs. Bolling put down her spoon. Her face was troubled and apologetic; and she was a little startled by the sudden realization of a state of things she had not, in her preoccupation, until that moment fully grasped. But the tone was an unmistakable prod.

"I am very sorry," she murmured, coloring in confusion. "It has just occurred to me that possibly you

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

might have cared to go to the dance. But somehow I had got from Mrs. Caldwell in our hurried conversation the impression — your black gown, my dear — I never thought to mention it. I really am very sorry.”

Marian made no effort to relieve the embarrassment. “Where is the dance to be?” she asked.

“At the home of some friends of ours, the Fontaines. I might readily have asked for an invitation for you. They gave also a large reception this afternoon, a sort of farewell occasion, for they are going abroad to be gone a long time, I fear. I went for a few moments while you were resting. I don’t think I ever looked at a more beautiful girl than my young hostess was as she stood by the side of her courtly father and received their guests. There were a number of men present, most of them contemporaries of her father, and I was struck by the polish and the sweetness of her manner toward them. Sibyl is very high-bred. I wonder —” Mrs. Bolling was speaking absently, and without the smallest intention of imparting a sting, though making an unconscious comparison — “I wonder if you did not pass her in the street this morning on your way here? She drove by just a few moments before you arrived, a lovely, dark-haired girl in a muslin gown and a large hat of white chiffon. She and Roger must have spoken. Do you recall it?”

Marian’s face had taken on an odd, sphinx-like

THE INVISIBLE BOND

expression. She sat perfectly silent, as unconscious, apparently, of the other's presence as if she were quite alone — and as if the very riddle of the ages lurked in that rapt, peculiar calm. Presently she looked up, and she was smiling, smiling softly to herself.

“I think I do,” she said.

After the return to the drawing-room Marian seemed to feel herself absolved from all further duty in the way of conversation. She wandered restlessly about the room, drummed a little on the piano, fingered the books on the table, moved from picture to picture, and finally sank down on a sofa in the corner answering all the while almost in monosyllables. But at nine o'clock there came a diversion.

A firm, buoyant step hurried up the walk, sprang lightly up the flight of steps and over the door-sill, and then darted through the hall with the rapidity of the whirlwind, accomplishing the whole performance in such an incredibly short space of time that the two women involuntarily started and turned their eyes in the same direction. Then an indulgent smile overspread the features of the elder, and she rose and moved toward the door.

“It is Roger, come back to dress for the dance,” she said. “Will you excuse me if I leave you for a little while? I should like to speak to him.”

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

After she was alone Marian sat a moment in deep thought, her hands clasped about her knee, her gaze riveted on the rug at her feet, her expression a trifle hard and strained.

All at once she rose, threw back her head, and walked out to the flower-scented porch. Here she paused a moment, and then, in the same abstraction, she passed down the steps and made her way to the front gate, the moonlight falling weirdly upon her hair and her white gown, changing one to gold and the other to samite, and thus enhancing in her appearance a certain magical quality that made her seem to-night like a creature that had wandered out of some old, enchanted forest.

And it was here she was standing when Roger came down the walk a half hour later.

At the sound of his footsteps she turned and stood waiting, leaning her form lightly against the iron gate, which she had found open and then had softly latched. Under all her seeming languor there was the impression of energy quivering in every fiber, a sense of tension expressed in a look of almost breathless anticipation; and her eyes gleamed with a fitful, eerie light that gave a wild poetry to her beauty, and for the instant softened its mere voluptuousness into something finer and far more perilous.

He came up smiling, unconscious, thoroughly kindly

THE INVISIBLE BOND

— yet evidently eager to be off. But she did not speak, and she made no movement. He could not pass without being guilty of a rudeness.

He stood an instant somewhat taken by surprise, and confused by her strange stillness. And then suddenly, as if drawn by a magnet, his gaze rested full upon her; and again, as at the station, he was rendered spellbound in the presence of something that was not just beauty alone.

Neither spoke. Far down the street the sound of a mandolin and of young voices blending with it fell upon the ear, drew nearer and then receded, as the merry crowd passed into another square. Roger pulled himself together with a start, and his face was disturbed and a trifle dazed.

She lifted the latch and flung the gate wide, and a soft laughter broke from her when he did not move but stood stock-still, staring dumbly at her. She misinterpreted the look, and spoke rashly, low under her breath, throwing all the allurements of which she was capable into voice and manner.

“I have had all day,” she said, dreamily, “since that moment I saw you waiting for me at the station, the oddest feeling I have ever known — just as if it were not a stranger that stood there, but some one very dear to me in some other and far more beautiful existence; some one linked too intimately with my past

MRS. BOLLING IS ALARMED

destiny to make it possible for me to be formal with him long. Here at least to-night, under that old moon that knows all secrets, I cannot."

He laughed gaily. But he looked away, and a sense of embarrassment was growing upon him.

"Then you do stand a little in awe of the man in the moon if not of his earthly counterpart! A jolly time the old fellow must have of it up there if he has to remember everything," he responded in a tone that was definitely impersonal.

"Maybe he doesn't. Maybe he only deigns to remember those things that have a force in themselves, vital enough and powerful enough for resurrection. I know — I *know* that I have seen you before. Not just a photograph of you, not just some one a little like you, but you, your very self, *you* and no other. When you spoke to me the very tones of your voice were familiar. I had often heard you laugh."

"Can you tell me in what particular quarter of the globe I happened to be?" he asked, teasingly. "I only hope it was where clients were plentiful and lawyers few. That would account for any amount of hilarity on my part."

"It was where all lovely things have lodgment, and where —" she hesitated and her voice dropped to a whisper — "where I was supremely blest."

He glanced down the street, growing restive, yet too

THE INVISIBLE BOND

courteous to make the movement of departure until she should give him the excuse.

"Where all lovely things have lodgment?" He repeated the words smiling, yet a trifle wistfully, as to himself. "Where, oh, where is there such an Elysium on this earth? I was half hoping that you meant this ancient, highly respectable, but by no means spotless town until you said that. We have several things here that could hardly be described as lovely."

"It was in an even more delightful place than Lexington."

"More delightful than Lexington? What heresy! Where was it then? Tell me quickly, so that I can hasten to bring down the pride of these old Lexingtonians to a wholesome humility by your adverse comparison."

She slowly raised her eyes to his. "Do you really wish me to tell you?" she asked.

"If you will be so good. Perhaps it was in Jefferson County?" he suggested, gravely.

She threw him a coquettish glance that was yet half contemptuous; and she was by no means disconcerted. Then she turned and started up the path. But after she had gone a step or two she looked back, and a low laughter fell from her lips.

"Perhaps it was in my dreams," she said.

CHAPTER IV

THE COTILLION

THE cotillion had already begun, and the band was playing merrily as Roger Bolling went up the steps of a large buff-colored mansion in a quiet quarter of the town.

The house stood in almost suburban privacy some distance back from the street in the midst of a grassy lawn, and it was approached by a gravel driveway and foot-path that wound under a number of fine shade trees. Whether through an association of ideas, or because of something inherent in its style of structure, the place always seemed to Roger as especially designed for just such a proceeding as was at present taking place within its walls. Such a debonair and easy hospitality pervaded it, such a gracious airiness of tone, such a delightful suggestion of good cheer, that he never passed that way at any time or season that there did not immediately come before his mind's eye diaphanous floating garments moving lightly along the wide porches with their innumerable slender

THE INVISIBLE BOND

columns, and he did not hear in fancy the sound of music and of laughter accompanied with all the other evanescent tokens of mirth, half sad, yet sweet, that belong to a young and gay assemblage.

Not that there was lacking a certain dignity, for the house was old, being one of the many picturesque and characteristic abodes which early gave to the town a gentle grace of architecture that was distinctly Southern, and that was destined in later years still to preserve an antique respectability in spite of much unsightly newness. But it was a cheerful dignity, and of a somewhat different order from that of the other residences on a line with it. The latter were stately mansions, with massive pillars and a noble simplicity of outline. One of these, the house on the left, in particular — from the front windows of which not even a lamp shone feebly — seemed to rise in solemn reproof and negation, like a huge white sepulchre, from out of the shadows that surrounded it, heightened as were these by contrast with the electric lights of its neighbor's grounds.

Roger paused a moment and looked earnestly in the direction of this solitary domicile, which held for him a peculiar meaning. A sudden frown had overspread his features.

Within the building before him the band was still playing, a recurrent sob-like note that is seldom absent

THE COTILLION

from the most spirited dance music mingling in passionate insistence with the sigh of the summer night. Through the sheer curtains that waved a little with the coming breeze he could see graceful figures moving with rhythmic tread about the long drawing-rooms to the left. Now and then a silver whistle sounded clear and sweet. But he was only vaguely conscious of the brilliant scene; for the moment his thoughts were far away, grappling with the recollection of an ancient wrong and injustice.

Suddenly the music ceased, and he caught himself up with a start. Then, with a short laugh and a smothered ejaculation, he turned with instinctive good-humor to the present and ran quickly up the remaining steps, passing through the open doorway and on into the flower-decked hall.

A middle-aged gentleman who was that moment coming down the stairs caught sight of him as he appeared on the landing and turned with cordial alacrity. He was a thin, delicately built man, with a certain wiriness that belied his fragility; and though somewhat short of stature he yet gave an impression of elegance and dignity. His youngish face was smooth shaven, and the thin lips, as they parted in a sudden, flashing smile, revealed remarkably fine teeth. His hair, which was almost entirely white, and very abundant, was allowed to grow rather long, and was brushed

THE INVISIBLE BOND

back from his brow in a manner that gave a hint of eccentricity.

"Ah, Roger!" he exclaimed, heartily, extending a hand as graceful as a woman's, "I am glad to see you, my boy. It is always a special gratification to welcome your father and mother's son under this roof."

All the stateliness of the high-born Southron of a bygone day, the exquisite courtesy of the past, that somehow in most cases seems to have lost its fineness in the hurry of our commercial age, the lavish hospitality that was wont to throw wide the doors of home, proffering it and all that it contained to an honored guest, all this and more spoke in the low, beautifully modulated voice.

"I always feel it a special privilege to come here, judge," replied the young man, very earnestly and simply.

A whimsical expression flitted across Judge Fontaine's face. He assumed a mock ferocity. "But you are late!" he cried. "What do you mean by allowing all those young fellows in there to get the better of you? They've been dancing a quarter of an hour or more. You should not let your chances slip like that.

'Gather ye roses while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying,
And that same flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow will be dying.'

THE COTILLION

“‘To-morrow will be dying,’” he repeated, softly, and as in reminiscent sadness, to himself, while a shade of melancholy all at once fell upon his features and wrapped him in the quietude of a peculiar reserve. It was one of those moments when a curtain seems suddenly to be lifted, and behind it all the pain and loss of a lifetime stand revealed. But it was only for an instant.

“Go, my boy, don’t let me keep you. It is a merry throng that awaits you there. And it is a fine assemblage, my dear sir — a *very* fine assemblage — although a little confusing to an old genealogist like myself who is always listening for the dear familiar names. Too many of these are heard no more in Kentucky, and there is scarcely a state in the Union in which the children of my early friends are not wandering, so that if the question — ‘Whose son is this youth?’ — were put to me with respect to many that remain, which Saul asked of Abner concerning the young David, I should have to answer, as did the captain of the host, ‘As thy soul liveth, O King, I cannot tell.’”

He caught himself up with an air of profound apology, and again he waved his hand.

“Ah, but I am detaining you! Go — go and dance to your heart’s content. Then, if a young giant like you ever can know fatigue, come to me when you are tired, for a quiet talk in my library. I am putting the

THE INVISIBLE BOND

finishing touches to another long chapter of the history to-night. I should like to discuss portions of it with you. In the meantime I wish you a most delightful evening. Here — off with you! Sibyl is waiting.”

With an elaborate bow he turned away and moved with great dignity down the hall, pausing an instant on the threshold of his library to throw an affectionate glance in the direction of a black-haired young woman in ethereal white, who in that instant whirled past the opposite doorway, and of whom it was decided hyperbole to say that she was waiting.

She was dancing with far too evident zest for him to lay anything like that flattering unction to his soul, and Roger Bolling smiled a little grimly to himself at the bare suggestion as he strode into the drawing-room.

It was a very long room, distinguished, airy, Southern, with Corinthian columns, and dark wood floor, and an old-fashioned crystal chandelier of many pendants. The woodwork was white and carved, and against this the quantity of smilax that was everywhere used produced a pleasant effect of coolness and greenness. The orchestra was stationed on a raised platform in front of the open windows at the rear that looked out on the garden; and in the corner opposite the door Roger had just entered there was a round mahogany table gay with baubles, which was presided over by a very imposing middle-aged woman in black satin and

THE COTILLION

lace. The girl of twenty-two or thereabout at her side was blonde, short, and rather stout, her personality being in marked contrast with that of the elder woman. Yet a stranger would have known at a glance that they were mother and daughter. Despite the dissimilarity, there was still a resemblance, which, though hard to define, was potent and assertive. The other guests were seated in slender high-backed chairs, placed against the walls of the room, and they were laughing and talking in a lively way, throwing, however, from time to time, furtive glances in the direction of the leader, a very young man with a large nose, who led with a supreme nonchalance and disdain born of an overweening sense of his own importance.

Presently he gave the signal. The band struck up anew, and instantly a number of dancers were on the floor. Roger stood watching them as they executed an intricate figure with the abandon of high spirits and the ease of practised grace, his eyes following one of the number with the rapt, exclusive attention which, more than once before, when seeing her in a roomful, he had found himself bestowing upon Sibyl Fontaine.

She seemed well worthy of his notice. She was a very beautiful young girl, with something fine and distinguished in her appearance which enforced her individuality in any crowd. But beyond this there was more, a certain indescribable quality

THE INVISIBLE BOND

that gave tone to all the rest. One felt instinctively that hers could be no ordinary career, and that she was a being on whom fate had set a mark, not only in the gift of extraordinary beauty but of extraordinary power to feel. She was quiveringly alive to her very finger-tips, notwithstanding her outward poise. Her small head, with its crown of heavy black hair, was set nobly upon her shoulders, and she carried herself with an erectness that had in it a suggestion of pride of race, but was without hauteur. She was slim, albeit exquisitely rounded, being one of those lithe, small-boned women who have the charm of littleness without being undersized. As a matter of fact she was taller than the average.

Unlike others about her, her face was not flushed from dancing. She was white, white as a bride rose with the morning freshness upon it. But her dark blue eyes were sparkling, and once he heard her laughter ring out, sweet and spontaneous as a child's. Yet there was a suggestion of seriousness, of thought; and at times there was a look of almost sadness, in contrast to her spontaneous mirth, that gave to her a certain aloofness, as if a veil had suddenly fallen about her, and that seemed to assign her in all her glorious youth to a place apart from the rest of those careless, happy ones.

Roger Bolling watched her for a moment longer,

THE COTILLION

and again that odd smile hovered about his lips. All at once he turned abruptly and crossed the room in the direction of the favor table.

"How do you do, Mrs. Beverley?" he said.

The lady in black satin and lace finished with great deliberation the assortment of drums and pipes and silver horns she was making, stacking them into neat little piles, and then, very slowly, and with the elegant condescension of an empress deigning to bestow a mark of favor upon the humblest of her minions, held out her hand to the young man, who was waiting somewhat awkwardly.

"Mr. Bolling," she murmured, with downcast eyes.

The daughter sat watching the two unconcernedly. But, as Roger turned toward her, she broke into a short laugh and shrugged her plump shoulders a trifle defiantly, as in disregard of her mother's formality.

"I really was about to say 'Hello,'" she said.

"Were you? Then why didn't you?" asked Roger, gravely. "Since we have discovered that we are cousins — is it fourth, or fifth? — I think such friendliness might be allowed in my direction. Don't you? And isn't it what every one says over the telephone?"

She threw him a swift little upward glance, revealing a latent coquetry that blended oddly with her brusqueness and, laughing still, made a seat for him on the sofa by her side, sweeping away her flounces of yellow

THE INVISIBLE BOND

tulle with a dextrous movement of one hand. She lowered her voice.

"But I am glad that I am not talking to you over the telephone," she said, sweetly. "It would be too tantalizing."

Roger threw back his head and laughed gaily.

"So this is one of the times when I'm in luck."

Again her shoulders went up in a shrug.

"I want somebody to talk to — somebody besides mama, and it might just as well be you."

"Oh, don't spoil it!"

"I'm not spoiling anything, but you are spoiling something, and it's my pretty gown. There — you've caught your foot in it!"

He rose precipitately, aghast.

She bent her head over the billows of tulle, which she had caught up, while he watched her anxiously.

Presently she leaned back on the sofa. But she did not meet his eyes.

"Do sit down, Roger," she said, irritably. "It strains my neck to talk to you. I have had no practice in conversing with giraffes."

"But your gown?" he demanded, still disturbed. "Have I done anything very dreadful to it?"

"I can tell you better the extent of the havoc you have made if you will sit down."

He took the seat beside her. "Now!" he cried.

THE COTILLION

She looked straight ahead of her.

"It is not serious," she said, dryly, "only a tiny tear which can be easily mended, I hope. But in any case I should forgive you. I want somebody to talk to — somebody besides mama. She is apt to grow weary of my society, and you know it is not possible to be interesting to the uninterested. I really am awfully glad you have come. Every one is having too good a time dancing to think about me, and I am so tired of these idiotic fans and things. Did you ever see such a mess?"

"Judith, my dear," Mrs. Beverley put in, reprov-
ingly, "the favors are perfect — very simple, it is true, but perfect. Nothing is more vulgar than to turn an occasion of this kind into an opportunity for costly display. Sibyl has shown most excellent taste."

"She didn't this time, for she didn't buy them," remarked the daughter, pertly. "That crazy little Ike Morrison, who has got his head so turned to-night that I'm positively uneasy for fear it will never be straight again, selected them for her one day last week when he was in Louisville. That's why she let him lead. He's a perfect chump."

"A chump? What — what is that?" Mrs. Beverley looked from one to the other of the two young people, with her head on one side, like a meditative crow. Then something in the daughter's speech and

THE INVISIBLE BOND

tone seemed to appeal to her sense of humor, which was in reality peculiarly keen. She gave a brief glance in the direction of the small, large-nosed, consequential young gentleman, who in that moment was glaring about the room with the eye of a general marshalling his troops, looked again, nodded slowly once or twice, and all at once broke into a fit of laughter, of which no one who had not seen her thus amused would have believed her capable.

Tears actually came into her eyes. It was something to see Mrs. Beverley laugh. The combination of elegance and abandonment to unrestrained mirth is a feat rarely well accomplished. Mrs. Beverley suffered no loss of dignity in the act; and when she hastily reached for a delicate handkerchief of cobwebby lace and gently applied it to her streaming orbs, she was still the refined and impressive personage that she was in repose.

The mood was apt to pass quickly, and it was not surprising to see her handing out favors an instant afterward to a waiting group without a trace of merri-ment on her countenance.

Roger had watched the performance frequently, the daughter's usual half sullen nonchalance affording him an almost equal entertainment with that of the mother's outbreak.

"But why are you not dancing?" he asked of the girl, presently.

THE COTILLION

"I can't; I've sprained my foot."

"Honest?"

She looked him squarely in the eyes for a moment, and then reached for one of the trinkets on the table before her, toying with it for an instant as if intent on its workmanship.

"Oh, yes, that's perfectly honest," she said, at length, demurely, and with a return of her former coquetry. "I don't know what reason I should have to prevaricate. I am very fond of dancing, and the usual difficulty that is only too apt to present itself in my case, this time was avoided. I had a partner — at least it was intended I should have — all ready made and highly satisfactory, so that I escaped for once my usual attacks of palpitation of the heart for fear no one should ask me. Sibyl had a most excellent arrangement, and one worthy of imitation. Shouldn't you like me to tell you who would have been your fate had you arrived on time?"

"I should, most assuredly."

At the mention of his young hostess's name Roger looked quickly across the room, where a very pretty scene was being enacted. A circle had been formed of laughing girls and, in the center, bowing her pretty head to receive a little golden crown that was being placed upon it, stood Sibyl, the focus of all eyes.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

He watched her in a sort of abstraction, as completely forgetful of the girl beside him as if she were removed to another hemisphere. The sudden click of her fan as she closed it abruptly brought him to himself.

"Aren't you going to tell me?" he asked, quickly, conscious at last of his rudeness and endeavoring to throw a special warmth into his manner by way of conciliation.

But Judith Beverley was one not always easy to conciliate. Her vanity had received a stab and, like the average woman similarly wounded, she was disposed to be resentful.

"Perhaps Sibyl will be able to tell you," she replied, with a cold little laugh. "It was she who gave you away."

She rose suddenly with somewhat exaggerated alacrity.

"Here she comes now," she said.

CHAPTER V

HEARTS ABEYANT

SHE was coming slowly.

The band had ceased playing, and a general movement had taken place. There was to be an intermission, and already there was a hum of voices on the porches and out on the lawn; and from the old-time garden, sweet with mignonette and jasmine, light girlish laughter blended with the splash of the fountain and echoed down the fragrant aisles like a chime of silver bells. Within, some of the more prosaically inclined were wending their way toward the supper-room, the doors of which had just been opened for a continuous feast by a smiling and most obliging functionary who, with his corps of sable attendants, awaited the first arrivals with the confidence born of repeated victory and the Kentucky ducky's unshaken pride in the matchless excellence of his viands.

As Sibyl passed down the long drawing-room toward him, pausing now and then to throw a smile to one, a word or two to another, Roger felt again that sudden

THE INVISIBLE BOND

and unaccustomed sensation like an actual tightening of the muscles about the heart, which he had no words to define and which, with its piercing sadness, is apt to assail the young man of ardent and impulsive temperament who is yet on the borderland of love, in the presence of the woman who has made the first appeal.

Hitherto he had escaped all boyish fancies. Even in his Harvard days there had been no entanglements. Life for him had been too distinctly earnest; and, notwithstanding a particularly joyous and pleasure-loving inclination, there was the sobriety that is speedily developed in the case of one who in very early life has been called to a trust, the responsibility that at once invokes all the latent manliness and chivalry and tenderness of which he may be capable, that of a boy in relation to his widowed mother.

In some startling way the sense of reverence and protection that he had so long felt toward the most beautiful woman, for him, in all the world, now seemed suddenly to be transferred to one more beautiful still; and he stood disturbed, transfixed, intoxicated, almost dreading the first spoken words and longing to break the silken cords of an enthrallment from which he felt bound to escape. He scarcely wished to know her better.

In reality he knew her but slightly — although he had known her always. When he was twenty-one and

HEARTS ABEYANT

she but a girl of sixteen or thereabout he had left Kentucky to enter upon his university career. Of the seven years that had passed since then less than one had been spent in his boyhood home. He was deeply absorbed in his profession and, being considerably burdened with cares growing out of a straitened financial condition, it was his custom to go but little into society; so that the few times they had met since her return from college a short time previous, little opportunity had been given of breaking down the barrier of shyness which he was too prone to set up, and which sometimes made anything more than a surface acquaintance with him a decidedly difficult thing.

But as she came toward him at this moment he felt that there had taken place some subtle and mysterious change in their relationship through the consciousness, which each was intensely alive to, that this was to be their last meeting, perhaps, for years. Every fiber of his being kept reiterating the reminder. And all at once something seemed to nerve him to a fuller expression of himself than he had ever before been capable of with her. He advanced quickly, eagerly, to meet her.

Her steps did not hasten, but there was a little fluttering smile about her lips, warm, intimate, appealing, which sent the blood surging into his face.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

She held up a small glittering object, dangling it before him.

"Will you let me give you my heart?" she said.

He looked her straight in the eyes, without speaking, and then, as her gaze faltered, his glance fell upon the trinket which suddenly, and with an expression of playful earnestness, she was studying minutely.

"Wouldn't you be heartless if I did?" he asked, smiling, yet grave.

"That's a very bad pun."

"But wouldn't you? And do you always throw away the hearts that are given to you?"

"I wasn't throwing this one away. Besides, it was given too lightly to be fondly cherished."

"Is that why you were willing to bestow it upon me?"

Her arm dropped to her side.

"'Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won, I'll frown and be perverse, and say thee nay.' What do you think?"

Her eyes were full of laughter and of raillery, and all at once he met her challenge in a sort of reckless abandon.

"I think," he cried, with impulsive ardor, "shall I tell you what I think? I think that you are completely charming — that is what I think. Oh, give it to me!"

HEARTS ABEYANT

She had clasped her hands behind her. They were like two children in their delight in each other.

"Give it to me!"

"But if I do that, then I shall be heartless?"

"No; I will give you one in the place of it."

"One that some one has given to you?"

Again she was dangling it.

He did not answer for a moment, and when he did his face went suddenly white.

"No one ever gave me one," he said, simply, "yet I will give one — some day. It will not be made of tinsel, and possibly it will be disclaimed. But it will be worth having, if for no other reason than because no one else ever did possess it before."

He reached out his hand to her and, with a low laughter that ignored his seriousness, she dropped the little heart-shaped thing into his palm.

But a faint color had risen in the clear white of her face, and she threw a slightly nervous glance about the room. The haughty leader had returned, and at his command the musicians were tuning up. Gay couples were hurrying in from outside. Among these, passing the two near the doorway without the smallest recognition of their presence and with a distinctly exaggerated absorption of manner, was Judith Beverley, accompanied by a young man who had appeared just before the intermission. They took their places.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Sibyl's eyebrows arched with surprise. She looked inquiringly from Roger to Judith, and then back again to Roger.

"What does it mean?" she asked. "I gave you to her."

He whistled softly. Then his expression quickly changed.

"Did you?" he replied, gravely. "But you know that what we will not have ourselves we can scarcely expect another to value. You can see for yourself that she is more than contented with my proxy."

There seemed to her nothing to do but to accept this.

"I didn't know that my most unwelcome society was to be inflicted, and I have been commiserating with her upon another misfortune altogether," he remarked, cheerfully. "Really, it is the most rapid case of recovery from a sprained ankle I have ever seen."

There was such a total lack of resentment in the tone that she smiled at his unconsciousness. But she didn't tell him that it was at Judith's own suggestion, strengthened by certain coquettish little hints of proprietorship, it had been arranged that the two should dance together. She turned away somewhat distantly.

"I don't quite understand," she said, "but I am very sorry about it. I am afraid it is going to be rather dreary for you all alone."

He took a step eagerly toward her.

HEARTS ABEYANT

"It won't be," he cried, "if you will promise something."

The whistle sounded loudly, imperiously. She moved away, but he followed. From across the room a young man came hurrying toward them, his progress, however, somewhat retarded by the merry crowd.

"Promise!"

She paused, and he caught her hand. "*Promise!*"

"But what am I to promise? You haven't even told me."

Her eyes laughed back at his boyish tyranny in an expression half mocking, yet sweet and indulgent.

"Promise that you will come back to me — here — to this identical spot, the first, the very first moment there is another intermission!"

For an instant she hesitated. Once more the whistle sounded. Her eyelids faltered, and she looked quickly away.

"I promise," she said.

He stood quite still just where she had left him. All his senses were stirring, yet he was only vaguely conscious of the wild, impetuous throbbing of his heart as his eyes followed her across the long room in an intensity of gaze to which the whole machinery of his being seemed to make contribution. He was under the stress of an emotional excitement of the finer order;

THE INVISIBLE BOND

but with him feeling had not yet passed into the highest stage of harmony between its human and spiritual elements. The music of the pleading violins gave accent to his humor. The opulent odors of many flowers ministered to the daring exuberance of his mood. He wheeled suddenly and made his way through the open doorway, his face set resolutely.

Out in the hall a grateful breeze was wandering, and for a few moments he strode up and down, teased by the sound of merriment from which he felt himself excluded by the force of untoward circumstance. He was boyishly disappointed. He wanted to dance with Her, talk with Her, sit by Her side; and he wanted it all in a way that startled, while it left him half ashamed of his youthful ardors. In that moment he was not eight-and-twenty — he was barely eighteen.

Presently he bethought him of the judge's invitation. He was not expected so soon, he knew, yet he felt assured of a welcome; and if he might not be with Sibyl herself, the next best thing just then was to be with Sibyl's father, without doubt. A moment afterwards he knocked softly on the door of the judge's library.

He entered a large, airy room, in the center of which there was a mahogany table on which a student's lamp burned, its radiance lighting up an embarrassing disarray of books and papers and piled-up sheets of

HEARTS ABEYANT

manuscript. Before the table, bolt upright in his high-backed chair, the judge was sitting writing with great enthusiasm and delight, his fine brow serene, his face alow, and his hand moving over the rapidly filling page with a nervous energy that bespoke a complete absorption in his theme.

He had answered the knock mechanically, forgetting in the next instant that he was not alone; but all at once becoming conscious of that subtle something that makes known another's presence even in the midst of the most intimate concentration, he looked up. Instantly the pen dropped from his hand, and he rose.

"Ah, is it you, Roger?" he cried, with unruffled courtesy, despite the interruption. "How long have I kept you waiting, my boy? Not long, I hope. You see," he added, in a kind of shamed-faced acknowledgment of his inattention, and in a tone of apology, "I am apt — I am apt to be a little absent-minded at times — a little absent-minded. I am growing old, I fear. Ah, well, I find my heart grows young again in the stirring scenes among which I have been roaming." Then, as if drawn by an irresistible magnet, his glance wandered back to his unfinished sentence. "Just five more minutes, my boy — just five!" he exclaimed, quickly. "I am right in the midst of a serious business here and, like Bach with his dominant seventh, I shall

THE INVISIBLE BOND

have no peace if I leave off where I was. Pardon me. Just five more minutes. Sit down."

Roger took the proffered seat without compunction. The judge, he knew, was always at work upon one of the nine volumes of Kentucky history he proposed to write; and had Roger's visit not taken place until several hours later he would no doubt have found the energetic narrator of Kentucky events engaged with the same "serious business" which long had occupied his thoughts. Seldom anything short of a dire calamity or positive illness could induce him to lay aside his pen, and so small an occurrence as a dance under his roof was surely not to be thought of as sufficient excuse for an instant.

Presently the judge leaned back in his chair, and with a long drawn "a—h!" laid down his pen.

Roger started. In truth he had been dreaming.

"Ah, Roger!" he exclaimed, with his charming smile, "it is not a little task I have set myself. Nine long volumes in all, and as yet I am only at the outset. But the truth, the whole truth of history — whoever has been brave enough and good enough to write it! Some one has said that in history nothing is true but the names and the dates, whereas in fiction everything is true but the names and the dates. Surely one who has set before him the high endeavor of writing accurately of his own countrymen is greatly embarrassed —

HEARTS ABEYANT

greatly embarrassed. To divest himself of all bias and friendly preference; to approach his theme as a sacred thing; to set down naught in malice, so that he may escape the snare of Marshall, of whom it is true that old scores, long slumbering, found such revengeful settlement in his pages that his work has been practically given to oblivion — all this, and very much more than this, he must keep before him, if he would accomplish even the smallest part of the business of a faithful historian.”

Suddenly Judge Fontaine roused himself, and his manner altered strangely. “My boy,” he said, very gravely, “when you recall the trials that your ancestors endured to obtain this goodly land, does it not seem meet that their descendants should dwell together in unity?”

Roger flinched, but did not answer, all at once conscious of the drift.

“We leave, as you know,” continued the judge, in his chastened, formal style, “on the morrow, but before I go there is something I feel overwhelmingly constrained to say to you. It concerns your grandfather, Colonel Theophilus Hart.”

Roger’s face blackened. Had his recent client, the reminiscent farmer, but seen him in that instant! He was silent, and presently the judge rose, walked across the room, and pulled aside a curtain from a window.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

One solitary lamp burned dimly in a rear upper chamber of the great lonely house opposite. He pointed to it.

"It burns all night of late," he observed. "He is daily growing feebler. I am convinced that his time is short."

A moment afterward he laid a persuasive hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Roger," he said, haltingly, "it is a delicate subject to touch upon — ah, a most delicate subject. But I want you to promise me that you will make another effort to be reconciled to your grandfather."

Roger's face was quickly turned away. His teeth were set. The youthful glow had faded from his aspect. He was something more than an angry boy. Secret springs of powerful feeling seemed to have been touched.

"I am very sorry," he answered, stiffly, "but I will never again enter his doors. I cannot easily forget his insults to myself, but if I could, his course toward my mother —"

The judge came in firmly. "Ah, my son, but you must try to understand. Put yourself in the place of the old soldier. Remember that he never surrendered at Appomattox, and that your mother's marriage to the son of his dearest foe broke his heart. Yet he loved your grandfather, I have reason to know, with a devotion such as few can conceive of."

HEARTS ABEYANT

He went back to his seat, and presently he remarked in a complete change of tone, and quite carelessly:

"I don't know just how he is going to get along without his 'little comforter,' as he calls Sibyl. She spends as much as two hours of every day with him."

Roger started violently. A sudden flame swept through him. He sat studying the rug at his feet, speechless, supremely touched by the hitherto unknown act of womanly sweetness which, as by a mere chance, it seemed, had been revealed to him.

"It was at her request," continued the wily judge, "that I have ventured to remind you of his loneliness."

Roger rose. His voice trembled a little when he began.

"I hardly know, sir, how to thank you for your own and your daughter's kindness — if indeed I have any right to thank you for what you have done." He hesitated a moment, and went on, smiling grimly, "I cannot hope that my efforts will be successful; but please say to Miss Fontaine, if she should mention the subject, that I have agreed to do what you suggest."

CHAPTER VI

GOOD-BY

WHEN he made his way toward the drawing-room a few moments later the band was still playing, and the dance was at its height. Leaning against the jamb of the doorway, he saw only Sibyl Fontaine. She had grown whiter and stiller as the evening advanced; yet there were no signs of langour in the healthful, elastic form. As his gaze followed her, the realization of her departure on the morrow smote him like a blow between the eyes. He felt a strange catch in the throat. She was dancing, apparently, in complete forgetfulness of his existence, although more than once her skirts had swept his feet as she passed. A feeling of sadness, the source of which he did not seek to analyze, began to steal over him, and the wail of the violins grew loud and imperious.

He was turning away when a low voice spoke at his elbow. Sibyl! The name half rose to his lips — with all its pagan possibility, its serene silence, its tantalizing mystery; and he felt as if he were in truth standing

GOOD-BY

with bowed head in the presence of a prophetess who alone might know his fate.

He saw her as in a mist of unreality. He heard her low laughter as in a dream. Then all at once there dawned upon him the reason why from the confused, kaleidoscopic spectacle she had withdrawn herself, and he understood that she was offering him the dance. A light flashed from his eyes to hers. "Oh!" he exclaimed. And then, without another word, he took a hurried step toward her and, an instant afterward, his arm was about her, and together they floated out into the room, with smooth, rhythmic tread.

Was it a few moments only, or many, that the dance lasted? He never knew. He was only conscious of an exquisite sense of harmony as their steps blended in perfect accord, an acute recognition of her nearness that tingled in every fiber of him and was coupled with an almost reverential awe of her; while there swept through him, like the leap of a cataract, as he looked down upon the small dark head that was held so proudly, a mad, boyish wish that they might go on thus forever to the music of the sobbing violins.

But it was not the intention of fate in the shape of the cotillion leader that they should go on thus forever. Young Mr. Morrison, who was a gastronomer (which is a more civil term than a glutton, if less expressive), being at last reminded by the pangs of hunger of the

THE INVISIBLE BOND

savory viands that awaited his delectation in the supper-room — to the delights of which his labors had hitherto made him oblivious — gave the signal.

As the silver whistle sounded through the rooms, there was a general uprising and outpouring in various directions. The floor was speedily cleared. But still Roger and Sibyl danced on. The musicians, with a twinkle in their eyes, ignored the signal, their glances wandering from the music before them to the two supple figures, with crude but honest admiration.

When at last, with a grand flourish, the band ceased, the two found themselves entirely alone in the great garlanded room. Not any other dancers on the floor, not a belated couple anywhere. They stood facing each other surprised and abashed. A delicate pink rose in Sibyl's cheeks, and her eyes were shy and downcast. But it was only for the briefest possible space. She recovered her grasp almost instantly. Yet she made no comment upon the unconventionality. Her manner was only frankly cordial as she moved away.

"Shall we go into the garden?" she asked. "It is pleasanter there than on the lawn. The electric lights attract all sorts of horrid little winged flying things. 'The desire of the moth for the star' is attended with less annoyance. I can only stay a little while. I have all these people to look after, and I know that that bad little Judith isn't helping a bit."

GOOD - BY

She led the way into the hall, and he followed saying nothing. Her coolness and self-poise seemed wonderful to him, yet his heart was still bounding with varied emotions, and he would have preferred that she had been a shade less composed. A moment afterward she had gathered up her silver-spangled white illusion gown, and together they were walking down one of the little gravel paths of the moonlit garden toward a bench under a wide-spreading tree.

"I mustn't forget to give you this," she said, reminded that she still had his favor. "You know you disdained my heart."

"I didn't disdain it. I've got it in my pocket. I intend to keep it always," he answered, quickly.

She walked a few steps in silence. Then, as they reached the bench, she paused, careened her pretty neck and threw him a little backward, sidelong glance that was half serious, half mocking.

"Always is a long time," she responded, with a sigh. "Here is your little silver trumpet. I give it to the conquering hero that is to be."

He took it eagerly, holding it up before him, and examining its workmanship, with a whimsical expression on his strong young face.

"So you want me to blow my own trumpet?" he inquired, gravely. "Perhaps that is because you are afraid that otherwise it will not be blown. Well, I am

THE INVISIBLE BOND

not sure but that the fellow who has learned how to blow it for himself loud enough and long enough has found out a way to succeed. It is one way. But I scarcely thought it would be your way, and I don't think I will try it."

She sat thinking a moment. "I don't care whether you succeed or not," she said, presently, "as the world counts success. But I do — I do want you to deserve to succeed, which is better than anything else I have to give you in the way of good wishes. I have a good many. I select that as the very best one of all — as a sort of parting benediction."

He looked at her strangely.

"Would it make — would it make any difference to you —" He caught himself up with a start. Once before that evening, to his own consternation, he had found himself upon the verge of making love to her, if he hadn't actually done it. Situated as he was in life, the thing seemed inexcusable to him. He had certain distinct, old-fashioned notions of the relations that should be maintained between a young man and a young woman, when freedom of expression is denied the former, which the average person of his acquaintance would have scoffed at. Yet he held to them; and there were some things which he felt a man could not do and remain a gentleman. Among these he classed that breaking of the spirit of honor while the

GOOD-BY

letter is rigidly adhered to which enables a man to speak of love without binding himself to the obligation that love implies; and for himself he felt that he had no right to assume any greater obligations than those to which he already owed allegiance.

But he was not actually in love with Sibyl Fontaine. The feeling had not sunk down deep enough. He was still able to reason a little about it, and even his inexperience told him that he was safe as long as he could do that. But his whole being was going through an awakening. For an instant a door had swung open, and there had been revealed delights beyond his imagining. It had fanned the latent flame of feeling within him, which, a little more, would spread beyond control. He knew that, and that there was need now of the removal of all things ignitable from his thoughts as never in all his life before.

"It is kind — kind of you," he said, presently, in a voice that he tried to make straightforward and natural, "to care a little about my future. The thought of your and your father's interest in me will mean much to me in the hard struggle that is before me. I know that it is going to be a hard struggle, handicapped as I am at the outset by the need of money — that old harassment that has driven many a man into a corner and compelled him to compromise with himself." Suddenly he set his teeth hard. "But I shall not so

THE INVISIBLE BOND

compromise. And I am going to succeed! It may take ten years — it may take twenty years — before I shall go beyond mere mediocrity in my profession. Then let it. I shall work and wait. If energy, and perseverance, and singleness of purpose mean anything, and I know that in most cases they mean everything, I shall some day accomplish what I set out to do.”

“And that is —”

She was studying him intently. Her manner had grown serious, with much of its girlishness fled. For the moment she was a woman, earnest, thoughtful, and she seemed to be throwing her whole soul into a consideration of his affairs. The reminder of her departure was a constantly recurrent note. It had established at once a sort of intimacy between them which otherwise months might not have accomplished — forced the growth of their friendship, as it were, so that it almost bloomed a perfect flower in the course of a single night. She was very beautiful as she turned her face toward him in the moonlight.

“And that is —” she repeated.

He threw back his head and laughed a trifle nervously.

“That is to be a good lawyer for one thing. Sometimes the thought of it is over me to such an extent I am half afraid that in being that, as I surely shall be, I shall not be anything else.”

GOOD-BY

"But there is something else?"

She could not see the flush that mounted slowly to his temples, but she realized his hesitation, and understood it. He was finding it a little difficult to touch upon the highest aims of his secret soul.

"Yes; there is something else," he answered, finally, "and that is to be in a large sense a Man, with all that that may mean."

Her face kindled with enthusiasm.

"To think of it, to want to be it, to strive to be it, that is to be it already," she said in a low voice.

She sat tapping the turf with the toe of one little white satin slippered foot, her head thrown back and her gaze resting absently upon the picturesque panorama about her. Under the thick green foliage the girls in their white gowns looked like softly draped, moving statues as the moonlight fell upon them. The garden breathed enchantment. Near by there was a bed of lilies; not far away a clump of elder nodded in the silvery light; rose geranium, sweet pease, carnations, with a hundred other scented flowers, made the place heavy with perfume, while a wild tangle of honeysuckle and grapevine and Virginia creeper filled it with delicious shadows. It was an old, old garden, with perennials and annuals, peonies and bachelors' buttons, gillyflowers and marigolds, arbors and trellises — a spot which the judge and his daughter,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

with their strain of Gallic blood, loved above all others.

"There is only one pitfall for you," she said, after a while. Her expression had changed. It was half roguish, yet there lingered a sedateness.

He turned, expectant.

"You know you are a wee bit impulsive?"

He acknowledged it.

"And just a trifle headstrong?"

He looked rueful, preferring to hear something more like praises from her lips.

"If you happen to want a thing, even though that thing may not be the best thing, the right thing for you —"

"But the pitfall!" he cut in almost rudely.

"You may fall in love."

He was silent.

She too did not speak for a moment, and when she did her voice was very low and sweet and earnest.

"If you should make a mistake there," she said, "it would go hard with you — harder than with most. I am prophetess enough to know that."

A light leaped into his eyes. For an instant the entire round of his future seemed to stand still, while Destiny waited. He opened his mouth and quickly closed his lips again. A hundred invisible hands were urging him; a hundred voices were whispering in his

GOOD-BY

ears. His whole being cried out for her. Yet he neither spoke nor stirred. For once he was not impulsive. She changed the subject abruptly.

"It was not very nice of your Mr. Waller to select the evening of my dance for his departure. Do you think it was?"

He gave a sudden start, like one roused cruelly. But he answered lightly.

"He was very sorry. It seems that he had already arranged to go East on this particular evening with the beloved manuscript. I do believe he'd step over the dead bodies of all of us — if his publishers were on the other side; and that is the pleasant remark I made to him when I said good-by at the station. But is he my Mr. Waller? I thought he was yours."

"Mine? Oh, no. He is a romanticist, and a romanticist belongs only to himself."

"And what on earth is a romanticist?"

"A romanticist isn't anything on the earth. It is a being that inhabits a sphere that floats midway between earth and heaven, an ethereal region wherein the actual never occurs — and is never desired."

Roger's eyes twinkled with amusement. He whistled softly to himself as the picture rose before his mind's eye of a rather heavily built man of five-and-thirty, faultlessly dressed, with an amber-colored beard, cut pointed, a slight tendency to baldness, and persistent

THE INVISIBLE BOND

eyeglasses. It seemed on the whole a rather unsubstantial abode for his friend Waller, poet, novelist, and *bon vivant*. But he only remarked tentatively:

"He told me that he read portions of the new book to you."

Sibyl hesitated. "Yes. It is very beautiful, beautiful as a Grecian idyl, but with a difference. He made me think of Theocritus now and then. Only Theocritus lived it all, loved it all, meant it all, centuries ago."

He was completely startled. Her delicate characterization of the man of whom recently he had seen much quite took his breath away. It was so clear cut and so decisive — it revealed not only the keenness of insight which might have come through her college training, but it implied a dignity of soul that was not to be overthrown by flattery. Moreover it seemed particularly wonderful to him because it chimed in with his own awakening thought. But even yet he scarcely felt that he knew Waller. Several weeks before the *littérateur* had swooped down upon the old town from his home in Cincinnati, made himself completely fascinating to many persons, selected Roger as a boon companion from the first moment of their acquaintance, and finally departed leaving behind the wide-spread rumor that he had wholly lost his heart to Sibyl Fontaine.

Roger was more relieved than he was willing to

GOOD-BY

admit to himself by her tone. It was too calmly critical for sentiment. Yet it was without a shade of unkindness. Francis Waller had first attracted, then puzzled, and finally repelled him, the finishing stroke in the way of disillusion having occurred that evening when something in the artificiality of the man had jarred upon the young Kentuckian's sincere, healthful nature and more vigorous mentality.

"Do you always read people as clearly as you have read Waller?" he asked, a little awkwardly.

"But he is not difficult."

"He was for me — at first; and he is still, for the matter of that. I lack your intuition."

She turned her face toward him and smiled as indulgently as if she were speaking to a little child.

"He is of a type that is new to you, that is all," she responded, at last. "Yet it is an old one and it is constantly reappearing. He is of the class that Shelley, and Poe, and Rossetti belong to — with only a small part of their genius. In other words, he is a romanticist." All at once her tone grew grave and even anxious.

"But you understand him now — a little better than you did?" she asked, quickly. She seemed trying in an almost heartless way to enforce an opinion, in order that she might set him to thinking; and womanlike she saw only the one object before her.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

But Roger's sense of loyalty of man to man made it impossible for him to say more. The acquaintance had been almost thrust upon him, in a way; but he had yielded, and he felt bound to silence where he could not praise. He made an evasive answer. And then, suddenly, the image of the man, who all unwittingly to either was destined to play a most tragic part in the future life of one, became blurred and indistinct — lost in a more immediate contemplation.

He leaned toward her. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "if only I could talk to you about life, about the people I meet, about everything! You are so wise and so thoughtful; you are not like any other girl I ever knew. But you are going away!"

She moved back a little and turned her face from him, but her voice sounded sweet and soothing.

"Yes; I am going away, and I am sorry that I am going. I am not sure that my father isn't sorry, too. But it will be possible to study genealogies and write Kentucky history, with the extensive notes he has, almost anywhere, and that reconciles me. But I am going to please him, and he is going to please me, and I half suspect that we are like two old people who lived all their life in the country, out of deference to each other's wishes, only to discover when they were about to die that each would have preferred to live in town."

GOOD-BY

She spoke a trifle hurriedly, as if warding off a danger; and it was evidently her intention as much as his to steer his thoughts clear of the hazardous. Yet there was an intensity in the very air they breathed; in the languorous odors of the flowers; in the fall of the shadows across the moonlit sward.

"Wasn't it a sudden determination?" he asked, after a while, unable to keep the regret out of his voice.

"A week ago we hadn't even thought of it."

A wave of rebellion swept over him.

"But must you go? Why need you? It is not too late to reconsider. Talk it over with the judge again. You can telegraph to New York about your passage. Tell him — tell him —"

She smiled a little sadly at his vehemence, but she came in firmly.

"It is too late. We are surely going. But if we had stayed, I think — I think we should have been such good friends. We were just beginning to know each other."

He could not speak. He sat staring at her dumb and helpless, too acutely conscious that something fine and beautiful, which had for one instant touched his life, was about to vanish to find words.

She rose, avoiding his eyes.

"I am going to say good-by to you now," she said.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"There will not be another chance to talk to-night. And don't come to the station to-morrow. I want to say good-by to you here — in this old garden where the happiest days of my life have been spent."

He stood by her side and took her hand and held it closely for an instant. Then all at once he dropped it almost roughly. He wanted to say so much — yet he felt he should say nothing. The future, dark, unknown, beset with many difficulties, seemed to rise threateningly before him. He thought that in all honor it should compel him to silence. It was a moment big with meaning for them both.

"Good-by," she said, and mechanically he answered, "Good-by."

She moved slowly toward the house. But when she had gone a few paces from him she turned and looked back. He was standing just where she had left him, not moving a muscle.

She quickly retraced her steps. She came quite up to him. And then, as frankly and sweetly as a little girl might have done it, once more she held out her hand.

"Be a good boy," she said, as his fingers closed over hers.

And in an instant afterward she was gone.

CHAPTER VII

MARIAN'S SECRET

TEN days later Mrs. Caldwell and her husband returned. The latter, whom Marian had never seen, and whose position in his own household she soon discovered was voluntarily more of the nature of an appendage than an ally, proved to be a big blonde man of thirty-eight or forty, distinctly lazy, with an expression of countenance that was almost infantile in its bland sincerity, a manner that was noisily hospitable, and a tendency to embellish his conversation with reference to incidents in the lives of distinguished Kentuckians of the past and of the present which she immediately proceeded to nip in the bud. For motives of her own she had thought it advisable to put up with a little of that sort of peculiarity from Roger Bolling and a few older people she had met, but she saw no reason why the usual local characteristic should be flattered into continuance in the case of a person too amiably inclined to resent her lack of interest. She was not sure that he didn't think her a fool, however.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

But she was at no pains to dispossess him of that opinion, which he had evidently formed in the first hour of their acquaintance, when she had been left alone with him, while his more energetic spouse busied herself with important matters.

The little woman was all a-tremble. The melancholy event that had been anticipated had occurred. Her husband's brother, after lingering for a week, had died; and from the depressing scenes she had witnessed she came fluttering back to her nest like a frightened bird that has encountered the fowler in its flight, and been startled in the midst of its glad warblings by seeing a companion fall. She had known the dead man but slightly, yet her tender heart had been touched; and while her distress was mainly for the grief of her beloved Tim, as she called her husband — regardless of the fact that his name was Tobias and not Timothy — it was genuine in its way, and sufficient to enshroud her plump form in most unbecoming black.

This had involved something of a sacrifice. She had just escaped being a beauty; and she was shrewd enough to know her insufficiency, and to seek to disguise it by wearing very picturesque hats and gowns that atoned by their exquisite daintiness and elegance for the sallowness of her complexion and her quite ordinary dark brown hair. The latter, which was of the stiff and wiry kind, only with difficulty could be

MARIAN'S SECRET

persuaded into a pompadour, and Mrs. Caldwell deplored her shortcoming in this particular more than if it were a serious moral blemish. The fact is she was not given to any of those secret probings whereby cognizance may be taken of spiritual flaws. The strain of Calvinism which exists, and is often more or less dominant, with many of the Kentucky people, despite an obviously light-hearted and volatile temperament, was wholly absent from her. She was without consciousness of a weight of sin, or of any greater moral obligation than was implied in her unthinking attitude of universal kindness. But she was one of those beings who, though seemingly without a purpose, help on the world so bravely that one unconsciously places them in a category to which they do not belong. Her very presence breathed solace, and exhaled sweetness like a flower.

Her liking for Marian Day had its source in commiseration rather than affinity. In truth, it would be difficult to think of two organisms more distinctly opposite save in one particular, and that was a sensuous delight in ease that was strong enough with each of the two women to make existence without bodily comfort seem a torture. One had had always a nest lined with reposeful, downy, pleasant things that made life pass as smoothly as a series of happy dreams; the other had had scarcely a nest at all, but only an insecure perch

THE INVISIBLE BOND

on some bleak twig that threatened to break with every gust that swept it.

When, a year before, Mrs. Caldwell met the odd girl — exhausted from the strain of teaching and even threatened with ill health, despite her vitality and strong resilience — at the quiet little Kentucky summer resort where the two had passed a few weeks together, her heart had warmed to her instantly; and there had then sprung up a sort of intimacy that had continued throughout the twelvemonth, finally resulting in the invitation for which, if Marian had been given to prayer, her whole being would have lent itself in passionate, clamorous appeal. As it was she simply longed for it ceaselessly — in the school-room, while she paced with impatient, pantherish movement up and down her small confines, in the cheerless bedroom of the farmhouse where she boarded, with its hideous American oak furniture and ingrain carpet, or out under the open skies, where alone she felt herself not a captive.

Strongly impressed with the idea that the world owed her much in spite of the fact that it had persistently doled her out but little, she had clung, in the midst of all restrictions, to a belief in her own inherent force and the potency of her beauty, never for one moment having lost faith in either, or in what as the result of a combined effort they might do for her. It

M A R I A N ' S S E C R E T

had appeared that an opportunity had come at last, and her brain had teemed with potentialities — one above all others. So that to her self-centered view it had seemed a hard blow, one of those merciless acts of fate that made her feel herself a mere puppet in the hands of a malevolent power, when Death cut short her anticipations, forced her hostess into retirement, and herself into the formulation of a plan of action limited and in some respects distasteful.

Mrs. Caldwell was regretful, but helpless. What was even more discouraging to poor Marian, still clutching at straws, she was resigned. The various plans she had formed having been frustrated, the healthful but distinctly commonplace mind of the little woman immediately proceeded to adjust itself to existing conditions. The visit must necessarily be a quiet one — that, of course, was to be accepted at once — but she hoped by a particularly careful attention to all details relating to the physical enjoyment of her guest to make the time pass pleasantly, in spite of the disappointment; and she trusted to the luxurious living she was able to offer to compensate in a measure for the loss of more exciting experience.

Breakfast was to be deferred an hour every day, by way of carrying out the idea in one direction; and the servants were required to move with lightest foot-fall about the house lest Marian's repose should be

THE INVISIBLE BOND

disturbed. Then, an elaborate menu for each meal was devised, and countless other minutiae of a similar kind considered with which ordinarily Mrs. Caldwell was not wont especially to concern herself, her Tim's taste being of the simplest. All of which Marian Day, though by no means averse to such amenities, found intensely irritating, under the existing state of things.

On the morning after the Caldwells' return, the two women were still loitering in the little green and white breakfast-room, where the usual bountiful repast with which the Kentuckian begins his day had been far surpassed by the delicious meal that had been served. It was after ten, and Mr. Caldwell, having attempted a languid joke or two followed by an ever ready anecdote (to all of which Marian had turned an unresponsive countenance), had finally betaken himself to his law office, mindful, if not of numerous clients awaiting him, at least of the pleasant friends who doubtless would drop in, as the day advanced, to offer expression of condolence and chat over the latest news of the town and of the state.

As his heavy footfall echoed down the shady walk to the gate, Mrs. Caldwell sprang to the window, drew back a corner of the blind, and watched him lovingly. A little gleeful laugh broke from her, and the movement was spontaneous as a child's. He saw her and waved his hand to her, and she kissed hers in return. A smile

M A R I A N ' S S E C R E T

was still lingering about her lips when she came back, airily trailing her white dimity morning dress, which the privacy of her own breakfast table had permitted her to wear in exchange for the ugly black reserved for more formal occasions. Her spirits were somewhat recovered after the night's rest; and she was like a fine bit of porcelain bric-à-brac in her Watteau-like gown, as she again seated herself in one of the high-backed chairs, pushed away the laces of her elbow sleeves, and then leaned her plump arms on the table and clasped her hands.

"You mustn't mind him, dearie," she said, with her pretty lisp; "he simply can't help teasing every one he knows. He even attempted a joke once with Colonel Theophilus Hart, Roger's grandfather. If you had seen the indignant stare the insulted old gentleman gave him, you'd have thought he'd been cured for life. He just wasn't. But he has let you off easily. He is not himself."

Marian groaned inwardly; the prospect of what awaited her when Tim should be himself again was not alluring.

"He really is so distressed," continued Mrs. Caldwell, "*broken-hearted*, my dear. He loved his brother better than any body in all the world after me, and oh, —" the brown eyes began filling with tears, "it was all so sudden, and so sad and so pitiful!"

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Sympathy not being at Marian's command, there was silence. Mrs. Caldwell leaned her cheek against her hands. After a while she looked up.

"Now tell me a little about yourself," she said, resolutely. "Whom did you meet at the Bollings'?"

Marian stifled a yawn.

"I met a very imposing personage and her daughter. The mother looked and held herself as if her rightful place had been a throne. The daughter had the manner of a pert little lady's maid in a second-rate play. They drove up in all their grandeur and swept into Mrs. Bolling's with an air that rapidly reduced me to the condition of the Queen of Sheba after she had surveyed the glories of Solomon. There was no more spirit in me."

"Judith and Mrs. Beverley!" shrieked Mrs. Caldwell, choking with laughter.

"I liked the mother," coolly observed Marian, taking one of the long-stemmed roses from the bowl on the table, and ruthlessly pulling it to pieces. "I thought she was — well, the real thing."

"They are extremely nice people, my dear," remarked Mrs. Caldwell, very seriously, and with a hint of caution.

Marian flung away the rose. "The daughter is a spiteful little cat," she commented, carelessly. "And she has atrocious manners. She plumped herself down

M A R I A N ' S S E C R E T

into the most comfortable chair in the room, fixed her eyes on a photograph of Mr. Bolling that happened to be on the table, and proceeded to ply me with more questions about him than I could have answered if she had given me a week — or a life-time."

"Poor girl! She is simply daft about Roger. And the dear boy hasn't even a suspicion."

"Don't you believe it. If she is daft about him, depend upon it he has a suspicion. Men are not so innocent."

"At any rate he has never shown her anything more than ordinary civility, I am perfectly sure of that. Roger is not of the flirtatious kind."

"Perhaps his affections are already ensnared," suggested Marian, enigmatically.

Mrs. Caldwell started violently, and gave the girl a searching glance. Of course Marian's reference could not be to herself. But a little secret fear seemed all at once to rise up and confront her, and she was conscious of a misgiving. She thought of Mrs. Bolling, suave, unapproachable, as fixed in her inward purpose as in her outward conventionality, and the feeling of uneasiness deepened.

"Oh, doubtless you have heard the rumor about him and Sibyl Fontaine," she said, a trifle nervously, but tentatively.

Marian bit her lips and looked away.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"I have heard nothing," she said.

"The fact is," observed Mrs. Caldwell, quickly, with illy attempted lightness, "Roger is scarcely so situated at present to take unto himself a wife and I don't believe he is thinking of anything of the kind. But it would be a very delightful consummation both to Mrs. Bolling and Judge Fontaine if Sibyl and he should some day fancy each other. Sibyl is the loveliest girl you ever saw, my dear. I wish you might have known her."

An impatient flush had swept into Marian's cheek, but she only drummed lightly on the table with her fingers and waited for Mrs. Caldwell to proceed.

The latter shrank perceptibly under the cool, inquiring gaze that was leveled upon her.

"It isn't that Roger hasn't been remarkably successful," she declared, with a slight change of base. "Oh, I wouldn't have you misunderstand about that, my dear, for anything. It would do him a great injustice, and I am devoted to him. He really is wonderful, so thoughtful and steady, and such a splendid worker. Tim says all the lawyers speak well of him, and he really is regarded as the most promising man of his age at the bar. He seldom goes anywhere, and he just studies, studies, studies all the time. But of course he is still only at the first stage of his profession, and the law is not a gold mine, as Tim and I have reason to know."

M A R I A N ' S S E C R E T

She broke off with a little laugh and then, before Marian could say anything, began again, deliberately keeping the ball in her own hands.

"His mother simply adores him. She is intensely ambitious for him, and she thinks he is already a great man. I am not sure that I don't agree with her. There is something — oh, don't you know — so big and earnest and — and hopeful about Roger. He makes you feel as if the world were young again, and life offered a boundless opportunity for every living thing. Down in your secret soul you may doubt it, but you don't doubt it when you are with him. He is a tonic to the disappointed."

An odd smile flitted across Marian's features.

"I think he is a little like that," she assented.

"But of course his future is a most uncertain thing," Mrs. Caldwell supplemented, hurriedly. "They have had many reverses. His father's affairs were a good deal complicated, and in recent years they have been compelled to practise a most tiresome economy. Tim says that since Roger took the management of the situation into his own hands their prospects seem brighter. They had always been wealthy people, as we count wealth in the South, and it has been hard for Mrs. Bolling to know how to resort to some of the makeshifts that poverty compels one to. But no one ever heard a complaint from her. 'De thorybreds

THE INVISIBLE BOND

goes wid dey haid up till dey drap,' is what an old darky once said, and it certainly is applicable to Mrs. Bolling. You know Colonel Hart disinherited her when she married Roger's father. Old pepper-box! He has between five and six hundred thousands — which is riches for Kentucky; but not a red cent is to be looked for from him."

And having said as much the little woman leaned back in her chair and heaved a sigh of relief. After all, she did have a conscience. But at the moment it was being exercised more in relation to her friends the Bollings than to Marian Day. As far as Marian was concerned what she had said had been rather in the nature of an appeal than of a warning. She shared the girl's confidence in herself, little doubting the potency of the most intense and vivid personality she had ever known; and she herself had to such an extent come under the spell of its fascination as to dread its strength a little when exerted for masculine admiration. So she had kept back nothing. And while her high breeding revolted from such discussion of her friends, she had felt that there was no escape.

She sat tapping the floor with her tiny French-heeled slipper, feeling particularly virtuous. She even hummed a little air to herself, as she watched a ray of sunlight tangling itself in Marian's luxuriant auburn hair. All

M A R I A N ' S S E C R E T

at once she leaned over and kissed the girl softly on the cheek.

"I love you!" she exclaimed, "and how could anybody help it?"

There was something in the girl's tropical beauty, the soft tints of her beautiful flesh, her volcanic nature smouldering under her sullen silences, and the perpetual warring of her spirit against the indignities that life had offered, which Mrs. Caldwell felt and responded to, without even dimly comprehending what such things stood for or realizing that their effect upon herself was distinctly sensuous. Marian was a mystery she had not sought to solve; and she was in no sense an analyst.

"Did you ever hear of Francis Waller?" she inquired, presently, with an air of carelessness that was intended to give the impression that no motive, none, whatever, was back of anything she had just said in reference to Roger Bolling and his affairs. "I mean as an individual, of course, not as an author."

Marian's face took on a peculiar expression. She was finding Mrs. Caldwell most amusingly transparent, but she gave no sign. She did not answer for a moment and, when she did, her voice was low and tense, and her reply was very much to the point.

"I have heard of him," she said, "and I have read all of his books, every line of them, every word of

THE INVISIBLE BOND

them. I have even read every little scrap of prose or verse he has ever published that isn't in a book. I am always looking out for him in the magazines, and I have wanted to know him more than anybody I ever heard of in all my life."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Caldwell, opening her eyes wide, "Oh!"

She twisted her rings nervously and looked disturbed. "How strange!" she exclaimed, at length, "How very strange that you should think of him like that, when it is precisely —" all at once she broke off — "but of course it is no good going back to anything of that kind — now."

Her practical mind would have dismissed the subject at once, but Marian persisted.

"What do you mean?" she inquired, quickly.

Mrs. Caldwell broke into a laugh. She turned her head to one side, and looked at Marian archly. "Before — before all my little schemes vanished into air, I had thought to have him here quite a good deal this summer. He is in Lexington off and on, visiting people he knows in the town, or at some of the country places, and he has just been here. But his own home is in Cincinnati."

"Yes; I know," said Marian. A deep glow was burning in her cheeks, and her eyes were eagerly insistent.

M A R I A N ' S S E C R E T

"It is the most beautiful place, my dear," remarked Mrs. Caldwell, carelessly, "quite a palace. And he is all alone — not a near relative in the world, he told me, except a married sister who lives in New York."

"I know," said Marian again.

"I have sometimes wondered why he is still unmarried," mused Mrs. Caldwell. "If you could just see that house, my dear!"

Marian looked up. "I have seen it," she replied. "I once drove by it with a friend. It is something to remember — and to dream of, just from the outside even."

A servant entered with letters, and Mrs. Caldwell reached forth a hand mechanically.

"It is more beautiful still on the inside, I am told. I have never been there, though he has often invited me. He had planned to have me come this summer and bring you for a week, with a gay house party he intended to have, and I had accepted. Of course afterwards I had to decline for myself, but I meant to send you. Then, when he found I was not to be depended on, he changed his mind about the house party altogether, and now he writes me from the East that he doesn't know when he'll be back in Kentucky again."

She was still rummaging among the letters, her

THE INVISIBLE BOND

thoughts, with characteristic readiness, shifting immediately to other things at sight of the half-dozen missives she should have to answer.

"None for you, Marian. Shall you mind if I look over these? Here is one from an old, old lady, Tim's great-aunt, who lives in Richmond, Virginia. She remembers everything that ever happened since the flood, and she is rather entertaining. Out of deference to age, I suppose I shall have to read hers first. I wrote to her from Frankfort, telling her of our sorrow, and about you, and oh, lots of things. You see she appreciated it. She replied at once, and she has sent me a volume."

Marian rose. At the end of the room there was a little glass door leading by a flight of steps into the garden. She gave a strange glance at Mrs. Caldwell, who was already absorbed in her letter, completely forgetful of all else, and then crossed the room quickly, passing out by way of the little glass door. She could scarcely have trusted herself to speak, and she wanted to be alone. There was a vine-covered summer-house in the garden, and she made her way to it, with the instinct of a wounded animal.

Hot, bitter tears were blinding her eyes. A sense of passionate rebellion gnawed at her breast and filled her with impotent rage — against Mrs. Caldwell, her destiny, everything in life. For one little moment, it

MARIAN'S SECRET

seemed, the wheel of fortune had hesitated. Then it had revolved and the glittering prize she longed for had appeared, only to vanish an instant afterward, leaving her startled, maddened with disappointment, and desperate.

She sat down on the bench in the summer-house and clasped her hands, staring straight ahead of her and recalling word by word all that had just been said. Picture after picture rose before her of what might have been. Her old, unhappy past seemed to fade away, and she lost herself in contemplation of the gilded existence which she felt had almost been hers. Her heart was pounding heavily, and her cheeks were flushed. One moment she was all fire and spirit and audacity, confident to her very finger-tips; the next defeat, dejection showed in every muscle of her voluptuous form, in every line of her beautiful face. She felt herself strong to cope with circumstance, yet powerless in the hands of fate.

The garden was very small, consisting only of a flower-bed or two, several fruit trees and a few shrubs, and the near-by voices of the servants at work in the kitchen and in the laundry jarred painfully on her strained nerves. Everything jarred: the little plot smiling like a happy child in the merry sunshine; the bees humming in the honeysuckle vines; the birds carolling in the fruit trees. No blight had fallen on

THE INVISIBLE BOND

leaf or flower to frustrate nature's promises. The sight of such fulfilment only drove her to a more miserable revolt.

She had been there but a little while when something happened that gave startling interruption to her thoughts, and brought her to herself like an unexpected thunderbolt.

All at once she heard her name called once, twice, in a peculiar tone from the doorway of the little breakfast-room. Then, without waiting for a reply, Mrs. Caldwell gathered up her skirts and came hurrying toward the summer-house, agitated and breathless.

Marian sprang to her feet; a sudden apprehension of danger, of something indeterminate, yet terrible and imminent to herself, had instantly taken possession of her. She did not pass out of the summer-house but stood waiting, her arms hanging loosely at her sides, her chest expanded, and her head thrown back.

Mrs. Caldwell was white and palpitating. She held in her hand the letter which she had evidently just finished reading, and she glanced at it and then toward Marian several times without speaking. The breeze kept fluttering the loose pages, but she clutched them tightly. A frightened look was in her eyes, and her voice broke when she spoke at last.

She thrust the letter into the girl's hands with a helpless, bewildered gesture.

MARIAN'S SECRET

"Read it, Marian," she whispered, and sank down on the bench. "I — I am so confused. What can it all mean? But of course it doesn't mean anything, and I am just a silly goose."

Marian stood a moment in silence. She too had grown very white, but her command upon herself was perfect. She took the letter to the far end of the bench and sat down. There was not the quivering of an eyelid to betray her inward foreboding and terror. Then she began to read, very slowly and deliberately, as if prepared to weigh every word and give it its complete significance.

It was an old woman's letter, stiffly conventional, with a hint of the *grande dame* of other days in its prim diction and cold austerity. Its aloofness chilled her like a cold blast. Yet it was the evident intention to be kind. The first half dozen pages related to the recent family bereavement, but Marian did not hurry through them. She was nerving herself for what something told her would surely follow. At length she came to this paragraph, and her heart stood still:

"You say that you have a young friend visiting you. You do not tell me to what part of the world she belongs, but you remark that she is comely, and that her name is Marian Day. *Marian Day!* What a shock that gave me! Yet it is not strange that names should sometimes repeat themselves. Nevertheless,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

my dear, you have turned my thoughts backward. That name, though it was an obscure one here, and is doubtless now forgotten, is still very familiar to me, on account of a certain dark story connected with it which peculiar circumstances once brought to my attention. The lovely young friend you have with you has doubtless lived too sheltered an existence to know anything by personal contact of the sort of evil and sorrow that befell the Marian Day to whom I refer. But the story may interest you by contrast."

Marian paused. For an instant the little summer-house, the sunlit garden, her waiting friend — the whole round earth swam before her eyes in a confused and blinding huddle. She still held the fluttering pages in her hands, and her gaze was riveted upon them, but she was unable to read a word. Rigid as stone she sat, scarcely breathing. Then, with a mighty effort, she nerved herself and read the letter to its close.

Suddenly she rose. She had reached a decision. There was an element of audacity in her nature which enabled her to dare the truth, though caring little for it as such.

"Your great-aunt has a most accurate memory. There are no mistakes in the story she gives you here," she said in a low, hard voice.

Mrs. Caldwell looked up quickly.

MARIAN'S SECRET

"*Marian*," she cried, sharply, "what — what on earth do you mean? What can you know about it?"

"I know everything about it. I mean that it is all strictly true. No one could tell you better than myself how true it is." She stood a moment looking out at the glad summer sky. Her limp mull gown hung about her beautiful limbs like drapery hiding polished marble. Her face against its aureole of red-brown hair was startling in its whiteness. Her attitude was coldly defiant. But something like a sob broke upon her ear, and her expression altered strangely.

She gave a quick, uncertain glance in the direction of the small figure crouching in the corner of the garden bench, with bowed head and hands tightly clasped. The look was half contemptuous.

"It is a dark story, as your aunt informs you," she said, bitterly. "I should have told it to you, myself, perhaps, and not risked its coming to you in the way it has. No wonder it has unnerved you. I should have remembered the wide gulf of separation that the self-righteous place between themselves and those whose lives have been in any way touched by the blight of sin. I should have spared you this unpleasant moment. I should not have come here."

Against her sarcasm and her scorn Mrs. Caldwell was mute and helpless. Some consciousness of the secret fire smouldering beneath the clear-cut sentences

THE INVISIBLE BOND

held her spellbound in the presence of a force with which she felt herself unequal to cope. She only knew that in some mysterious way the two had seemed to change places, and that she had been made to feel that it was herself who was on trial and not Marian Day.

"Ah, my dear — my dear —" she gasped. The tone was deprecating and almost apologetic.

The color began slowly to return to Marian's face. She looked quickly away, and a faint little smile played about her lips — and was gone.

When she spoke again her voice, her manner, her very personality even seemed changed. She was subdued, plaintive, appealing. There were tears in her eyes and her lip trembled like a child's.

"I ought not to have come," she repeated. "But oh, I was so miserable, so desolate; and it seemed such a beautiful thing to be cared for, and to be treated as if there were no shadow over me. You can't think how this thing has followed me. Not that any one in my new life ever knew. No one knew. But I knew; and the dread of just such a moment as this has been a torment ever since I met you. You have been so good to me. Shall you — shall you turn me out — now that you know about me?"

Added to her well-feigned humility there was a hopelessness that went straight to Mrs. Caldwell's simple, kindly heart. All at once the little woman

MARIAN'S SECRET

gathered herself together. She gave a sudden start, rose, and then came hurrying across the intervening space with outstretched arms.

"Turn you out?" she cried. "Oh, you poor dear thing!"

She drew the girl down to the bench and folded her to her warm, ample breast in a tender embrace. "There, now, there, dear," she crooned. "Turn you out indeed! What on earth could you have been thinking of, child?"

Marian's face was hid, but she lifted it presently with the same sweetly humble look upon it which Mrs. Caldwell had found so touching.

"Then you can forgive me?" she asked.

"Forgive you! For what should you ask forgiveness of me?" replied Mrs. Caldwell, only holding her the more closely.

"For — for not telling you, for one thing," said Marian, with a sad, faltering smile.

"But I am the one to ask forgiveness of you," said Mrs. Caldwell in another burst of tenderness. "It was cruel of me, brutal beyond expression to bring that letter to you. I don't know what could have made me do it, except that I was unnerved, as you said. I didn't really believe that the story concerned you, and yet — there was the suspicion. I wanted — I just wanted you to prove to me that it was all nothing to

THE INVISIBLE BOND

you. Oh, you poor, poor dear, how you must have suffered!"

She bent down her head and kissed the girl's neck where the nape of it showed above her thin gown. "It is so soft and white," she whispered, fondly, and in a voice which she strove to make as natural as if nothing had occurred.

Marian extricated herself, and moved away. She walked over to the entrance of the summer-house, and stood a moment. When she turned her face was white and cold again.

"Shall you feel that you must speak of this to — to Mrs. Bolling, for instance?" she demanded, rather distantly.

Mrs. Caldwell looked troubled.

"I shall not feel that I must speak of it to Mrs. Bolling."

Marian was seized with a sudden panic of real fear. She searched her friend's face for an instant, and then dropped down on the ground and knelt beside her, clutching wildly at her hands.

"Promise me that you will not speak of this to any one — even to Mr. Caldwell," she said, breathlessly.

Mrs. Caldwell hesitated. She had no secrets of her own, and those of other people she happened to know she invariably told to Tim; yet there was something in

MARIAN'S SECRET

the energy and inherent forcefulness of the girl that constrained her.

"I shall not even tell Tim."

"And you will give me that letter?"

The tone was imperious, compelling.

"Yes — yes, I will give you the letter."

Marian raised herself a little, and fixed her burning eyes on the other's face.

"Swear to me that you will never tell," she insisted, in a low, tense voice.

Mrs. Caldwell looked grieved. Despite her unthinking amiability she was not without her little pride and dignity.

"My word, Marian, should be sufficient," she responded, gravely.

The girl flung herself upon her in a sort of frenzy.

"Oh, pity me," she cried, "I am so miserable — miserable!" Then she raised her head again and the strange light shone in her eyes. "Swear!" she cried.

There was a moment of waiting. Then the little woman bent down and took the girl's face in both her hands.

"I swear," she said.

CHAPTER VIII

CIRCE

It was the last of August.

Already there had come a few cool days to Kentucky. Although warm weather would return and probably continue for many weeks, the first note of change had sounded — echoing with melancholy sweetness down the forest aisles — with the waning of the fiery noontide heat, the delicious twilight languor, the dream and the ecstasy of lovely moonlit nights. And as if in awe of Nature's summons the great passionate heart of Summer had seemed for an instant to be chilled, startled in the rapture of a mighty love, and fearful despite the sun-god's flaming banners.

To Marian Day the approach of autumn had come as an agonizing reminder of things already borne and of what might possibly still have to be endured. Her visit had lengthened into nearly six weeks, and it had been a humiliating and absolute failure, with respect to everything she had hoped for and anticipated. In ten days she was to return to the uncongenial duties

CIRCE

of her former existence, unless fate, which had already seemed to her pitiless to the point of cruelty, should relent and intervene. The little country schoolhouse wherein she had spent many never to be forgotten months of torture was constantly before her eyes. Even in her dreams she would see its bare walls, the hideous air-tight stove, the cheap wooden benches, the blackboard, with some arithmetical problem or a lesson in English grammar outlined upon it, and wake suddenly as if stifled in the close atmosphere of the badly ventilated room. The odor of apples and of stale lunch baskets seemed a reality. At such moments she would open her eyes, raise herself quickly on one elbow and gaze about the luxuriously appointed apartment provided for her, with a look of abject terror. Then, as the recognition of her temporary reprieve forced itself upon her troubled consciousness, she would sink back among the pillows of her carved mahogany bed, with its old gold satin canopy, its fine embroideries, its snowy whiteness of spread and drapery, with an intensity of sensuous delight which had in it a certain animal enjoyment not unlike that of a tired steed that has slipped the halter and at last lies wallowing in some green woodland pasture.

At the end of the last school term she had secretly registered a vow that she would never again return to her prison house. Yet from all indications it would

THE INVISIBLE BOND

seem that she was to return to it, and that right speedily. The thought drove her to desperation.

She had met most of the representative people of the town, old and young, many of whom, however, had come as a mere form to bestow a visit of perfunctory condolence upon Mrs. Caldwell, not knowing that she had a guest. From time to time Roger Bolling had brought relays of young men — for the most part poor young lawyers like himself, pleasant, attentive, yet lacking, as she soon discovered, his distinction, his inherent strength and charm. On the whole they did not seem to her to be worth while, and she exerted herself little for their entertainment, reserving her efforts for Roger himself in a manner that was subtly flattering and compelling.

The two had been much together. But Mrs. Caldwell, watching the situation with almost as much trepidation as Mrs. Bolling herself, had at last quieted her fears. It did not seem likely to develop into an affair, although it was evident that some mysterious bond of interest, stronger than the courtesy that the peculiar circumstances demanded, drew Roger to the girl, and held him, though by no means a captive. She could not know that his state of mind was a direct outcome of certain conditions that had to do with his unsatisfactory relation toward Sibyl Fontaine.

As a matter of fact, during much of the time that

CIRCE

had passed since Sibyl's departure he had been as distinctly miserable as his buoyant nature would allow. Too bewildered by the mad rush of feeling that had assailed him at first to reason calmly, the thought of her had gradually become a torment. As an escape he had sought to forget her by means of an even closer application than ordinary to his work. He worked furiously, irrationally, with the sort of desperate energy that certain high-strung temperaments resort to as a safety-valve against themselves. And in his moments of inevitable reaction, with the return to the old restlessness or apathy as the case might be, he sought the society of Marian Day, who, in his excited state, was able to offer an appeal which she would have been powerless to make had he not been thus aroused. That this appeal was distinctly to the lower side of him, that it was unspiritual, and at times deliberately earthy, he scarcely knew. His experience of life had not been wide; and there are natures that can only find out poison by tasting every common bush and flower.

During this tremendous crisis of his development, Marian Day, suspecting everything, though apparently seeing nothing, had watched him as a cat watches a mouse, realizing perfectly the precise moment in which to spring, and not daring to precipitate matters by so much as an injudicious movement of an eyelash, lest she should lose all.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

The delay had gone beyond her expectations. But she had not for one instant lost faith in herself. It was time, time that she asked for, and that only. The thought of what must be accomplished, if ever, within the next ten days would have been unnerving to some women, paralyzing their charm. To her it was a powerful stimulus that revealed itself in a glow and sparkle that was contagious, and that went to the head like wine.

She was lying outstretched in luxurious abandon, one warm afternoon, tossing a little restlessly from time to time on her couch, as she reviewed the critical situation with a coolness that combined an unwilling admiration and the impatience she felt against the strength she had to combat, when there came a light tap on her door.

Mrs. Caldwell entered. She stood an instant poised like a bird ready for flight, and then moved softly on tiptoe into the room. She sat down on the edge of the lounge.

"I didn't wake you? You are sure? I think people that are inopportune are such horrors, and you know I want you to rest, rest, rest, so that I can send you back strong and well to your school this autumn. I do think the visit has done you good. Your neck and arms are quite beautifully plump — lovely, my dear. But ought you to leave them bare like that?

CIRCE

You might fall asleep, and then you would be certain to take cold."

"I haven't been asleep, and I am quite comfortable," said Marian, wondering what all this was leading up to. "I shall not do anything to make myself ill. These last ten days mean too much to me."

Mrs. Caldwell's face grew troubled. But Marian's tone was entirely simple, and there seemed no hidden meaning lurking in the words. She was thinking that, if it were not for Roger Bolling and her sense of obligation there, she would be glad that the visit should be prolonged. But she only said:

"There was a telephone message, and I answered, thinking you were asleep. Roger wanted to know at what hour he should come for the drive this afternoon. I suggested half-past five, and he said he thought five would be better."

Marian busied herself tucking up the tawny mane hanging loose about her. She kept her face turned away. Had Mrs. Caldwell seen the gleam that suddenly shone in the amber-colored eyes, and the look of almost savage triumph traced upon the clear-cut features of her guest, she would have been convinced of much that she preferred not to believe; and Mrs. Bolling's disturbance, which she could no longer persuade herself was something conjured up by her own

THE INVISIBLE BOND

supersensitive fears, would not have seemed altogether groundless.

"I have just come from Mrs. Bolling," she remarked, presently, giving a partial expression to her thought. "She is looking wretched — really shocking, I think. She is not at all well, and she seems so — so troubled."

"Does she?" inquired Marian, simply. "I didn't know of her illness. Her son did not mention it."

"When did you see Roger?" demanded Mrs. Caldwell, quickly.

Marian opened her eyes. Then she met Mrs. Caldwell's gaze with the utmost frankness.

"When?" she replied. "This morning, while I was down town. He joined me and walked as far as the library. He seemed in good spirits, I thought."

"I don't think she is anxious particularly over money matters at present," Mrs. Caldwell continued, seeming to find a painful satisfaction in the theme. "Tim says Roger made a most excellent sale of some of their Main street property a day or two ago. He is going to invest the proceeds in Western lands. But of course they won't yield anything for quite a long time," she added, hastily, suddenly seeing the drift of her words.

Marian stifled a yawn. "Has she consulted a physician?" she asked, with wholly impersonal interest.

"Yes; and his report is not encouraging. She has

CIRCE

had pneumonia twice, and he fears some serious lung trouble. She has told nothing of this to Roger yet, and you mustn't let him know of anything I have said. I think she intends to tell him, though, and I have mentioned it to you as a sort of explanation of why you will probably not see very much of him during the remainder of your visit. The doctor says that she must keep much in the open air, and that Roger must take her driving every day."

Mrs. Caldwell folded her tiny hands in her lap and sighed. There were times when Marian's secret weighed heavily upon her, and when the thought of it, added to the responsibility she would in any case have felt, was insupportable. In view of it, anything like a love affair between the girl and Roger Bolling seemed a catastrophe that would be indeed appalling.

But her perturbed spirits had been soothed and reassured by the calm of Marian's manner. Presently she sprang up briskly.

"It is nearly five and you must dress," she cried. "Roger will not forgive me if I shorten your last drive together. Poor dear! He will have thoughts now only for his mother."

At the door she turned and looked back smiling.

"I am so glad that you are not his sweetheart, dearie," she said, with a sudden daring that left her all a-tremble.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Marian was moving softly about the room with her smooth, cat-like tread. She paused.

"Are you?" she inquired, nonchalantly. "Why?"

Mrs. Caldwell fumbled awkwardly with the door-knob. The question and Marian's directness had completely disconcerted her.

"Oh, because — because it would be so — *sad!*" she murmured faintly, as her eyes filled with tears.

Half an hour later Marian was moving quickly down the walk in her white duck gown toward Roger Bolling and his restive thoroughbred. She was radiant. Her eyes behind her thin gauze veil shone darkly luminous, and he stood watching her as she approached with an expression on his aristocratic features that would have sent a thrill of horror into Mrs. Caldwell's gentle breast had she seen it. Without speaking she gave him her hand for an instant and then sprang lightly into the trap, and in silence he took the seat beside her. But as the bay dashed forward he turned to her.

"In which direction shall we go?" he asked, briefly, avoiding her eyes.

"Let us first go through the town and then out on any one of the country roads. I leave the choice to you."

He hesitated. "But why through the town?" He broke into a short, embarrassed laugh. "It is county court day, and — there is also a circus."

CIRCE

But there was method in Marian's delay.

"I know," she responded, sweetly, "and that is why I want first to go through the town. I like it when it is alive like that."

He turned the horse's head resignedly. "If you hope to see Phyllis and Corydon, I warn you you will be disappointed."

"Why?"

"Because Phyllis will be such a stylishly dressed young person you will not even know she is Phyllis, unless I should be sufficiently informed to point her out to you, which I doubt; and as for Corydon, he will be such a splendid big six-footer that you will not take him for a rustic but a prize fighter."

To-day there was a sort of suppressed excitement in his manner which she perceived instantly, and which was added fuel to the flame her own desperate determination had kindled within herself. His boyish face was pale and the gleam that shot now and again from his gray eyes revealed the secret perturbation he sought in vain to conceal from her. He was fast losing his head, and she knew it. The thought rushed through her like the leap of fire, as they picked their difficult course through the noisy thoroughfare.

"It is too crowded," she said at last, as an electric car sped past them almost grazing their wheels. A small boy with a balloon whistle had well-nigh

THE INVISIBLE BOND

encountered Juggernaut, Roger turned the trap so quickly.

A few moments afterward they were out upon one of the loveliest of the country roads, far away from the din of the town.

There had been frequent rains and the woods were not at all parched. Marian, with wise procrastination, folded her hands and looked away toward the gently rolling fields, with an expression of serene contentment in her eyes.

"How beautiful it is," she murmured as to herself, "how beautiful!"

Roger caught at the impersonal note as a drowning man catches at a straw. He had been frantic to be alone with her, and at first was not a little piqued at the nonchalance that could seem to find greater pleasure in the excitement of the blatant streets, where it was impossible for him to say a word to her with comfort, than in his untrammelled society. But now that the longed for moment had come, he was dumb.

"Yes, it is very beautiful," he answered after a while, still avoiding her eyes. "It is sometimes a little surprising to me, though, that strangers find at once as much to admire in the Bluegrass scenery as they do. There is nothing imposing about it, nothing inspiring as in more rugged landscapes, nothing immediately

CIRCE

to catch the attention. Yet nearly every one that comes here cares for it."

He spoke hurriedly, nervously, as one whose spirit was not calm for such discussion. She was silent, as if preoccupied and wholly taken up with the view.

"I didn't know that you cared particularly for anything like that," he observed, a trifle morosely, after a while, again beset with a desire to direct her attention to himself. The fact was that he had often noted her apparent indifference to the very thing she was now professing to admire.

Marian withdrew her gaze. She turned to him with a slow, beautiful smile.

"I have grown to love it," she said, softly.

The look and the tone were unmistakable. A hot flush swept to his temples. But he only said:

"What is it you see in it especially to care for?"

She heaved a deep sigh. "Oh!" she cried, with a laugh, and a piteous, half tearful note in her voice, "it is the sense of — of plentifulness that it gives one, just that. I never had a plenty of anything in all my life — unless it was a plenty of trouble."

His face grew tender. Had she looked at him in that moment there would have been little doubt in her mind as to what she should do next. But it chanced that just then they came in sight of one of the picturesque homes for which the region is famed — a great

THE INVISIBLE BOND

square building with wide porches and tall white pillars set back in the midst of a park of noble forest trees, and her attention was misdirected. When she spoke again he was grave and calm.

"Who lives in that lovely old place?" she asked, quickly, her eyes greedy with longing for the merely material.

"Some people from the East of the name of Sullivan," he replied, shortly.

"Do you know them?"

"Slightly."

"How long have they lived here?"

"About two years. They have a stock farm."

"How many of them are there?"

"Only two — the man and his wife. Why are you interested?"

She leaned back and slowly unclasped her gloves, keeping her eyes downcast.

"I don't know that I could make you understand," she said, at length. "But it is always interesting to me to remember that there are people in the world who have escaped the rude blasts of life — for whom existence is smooth and well ordered, far apart from the vulgar highway on which many of us have to trudge and drudge, like weary rock crackers, every day, solely in order that an unhappy soul may not take leave of its body."

CIRCE

Roger slackened pace a little that she might see the place more distinctly. Then he remarked, laconically:

"The people who live there scarcely answer to your description about the smooth, well-ordered existence and all that. Mr. Sullivan comes from a very humble walk in life, and he has seen about as hard times as anybody I ever heard of. I am not sure," he threw back his head and the old boyish laughter — yet with a difference — rang out, "I am not sure that the vulgar highway in his case did not include a veritable rock pile. At any rate, he moiled and toiled for many years before anybody ever heard of him except as a day laborer. Then somebody over in Europe died and left him a small fortune. He invested it, and it was not long before he was worth several hundred thousands. After that he gambled quite extensively and successfully in Wall Street. He is now a complete wreck, so far as health is concerned, and he is also a very unhappy person indeed. His wife, who is a rather pretty woman and of a very different grade of life from his, has a decidedly rough time of it with him. He is penurious and underbred, and on the whole her lot seems to be anything but one to envy. Waller knows her very well. It is one of the places he visits a good deal, and —" All at once he broke off and whistled softly. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" he exclaimed, "if there isn't the

THE INVISIBLE BOND

fellow now! And I thought he was hundreds of miles away from here."

Marian's face went suddenly white, and a startled look came into her eyes. She glanced quickly in the direction he indicated. She was trembling as if they had suddenly encountered an apparition. But all at once her features were illuminated by a strange smile. She threw back her loose gauze veil and sat bolt upright in the trap, looking toward the top of the hill with an expression that was half dubious, yet infinitely daring. A soft, delicious color swept into her cheeks. She had taken off her gloves, and with one swift, deft hand she smoothed the stray locks about her temples.

Francis Waller came slowly down the road, with his hands in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth, a collie following at his heels. He was dressed with the utmost care, but despite a certain elegance of attire and bearing, an unmistakable air of polish that bespoke equally the scholar and the man of the world, he was scarcely a pleasing figure, at first sight. There was something ugly and disproportionate about the somewhat ponderous form. His body was too long and his legs were too short for symmetry; and there was an indolence of general aspect that made him seem older than he was, and that was in direct contrast with Roger Bolling's athletic energy and nervous, animated mien. But in spite of all this there was that in his appearance that

CIRCE

caught the attention and held it. One knew him at once to be not an ordinary man. The look in his light, greenish eyes was brooding, thoughtful, poetic. They were most expressive eyes, and at times they had been known to grow dark and beautiful with emotion. The mouth was less winning. There was a suggestion of both the cynic and the sensualist in the curves of the full red lips.

Yet, strictly speaking, he was neither a cynic nor a sensualist. The gods of Law and Order — the only Omnipotence he believed in — were still able to compel from him a sort of allegiance which kept him obedient in the main, notwithstanding the occasional captious note; and an innate fastidiousness, a loathing for the mere irregularity and hideousness of vice, as opposed to the harmony and beauty which nature had taught him to worship, kept his life cleaner than that of most men, albeit wholly independent of the influence of either ethics or religion.

He was walking in deep thought, with downcast eyes and head sunken a little on his chest, so that he neither saw nor heard the approaching vehicle until it had passed just a few yards in front of him. He looked up surprised, and gave an uncertain glance around as if unable immediately to get his bearings. An instant afterward the greenish eyes behind the inevitable glasses twinkled humorously, and he came to an abrupt

THE INVISIBLE BOND

standstill. Then he most deliberately removed his pipe from his mouth and his hat from his head, and came forward, all in that quiet, cool way of his that somehow gave the impression of extreme courtesy, despite its hint of insolence.

"Hello, Roger!" he said, as if their meeting thus were quite the most natural thing in the world.

The two men clasped hands, Roger returning the greeting with a lordly ease that was more than a match for the other's nonchalance. While it seemed to recognize a past good comradeship, it also bore witness to the break in their friendship, which had come about neither knew precisely how, and which somehow refused to be mended. To cover over the slight coldness which his manner betrayed, Roger resorted to a light and jocular tone. He immediately introduced him to Marian, pronouncing her full name in a sort of boyish banter.

Francis Waller was by no means deceived. He was a person of quick discernment as well as of great vanity, and the first note of dereliction toward himself was apt to fall upon his sensitive ear like a rude discord. Until that moment he had kept his eyes on Roger's face with an expression half pained, half satirical. At the mention of her name, however, he looked for the first time definitely toward Marian Day.

Their eyes met, and as the full realization of her

CIRCE

beauty, which was of an order that he found particularly alluring, swept in upon him, he drew back a step or two and bowed low, while his thin skin where it showed above his light brown Vandyke beard flushed a warm pink that mounted quite up to his brow.

But where had he heard that name before? It was oddly familiar. Or was his memory playing him some trick? He stood wondering, irresolute, his gaze still riveted upon her.

Marian did not aid him, but she leaned quickly forward and gave him her ungloved hand, its pulses throbbing warmly in his clasp.

"At last!" she murmured, softly, while her lips parted in a bewildering smile.

The tone and the look were a drop of balm to a wound. Francis Waller gave her his complete attention.

"But I have met you before —" he began.

She looked away. "You have never met me before," she replied, with a barely perceptible coolness. Then she added, "But I had hoped to meet the great author this summer. Mrs. Caldwell intended to send me to see you, if your prospective house party hadn't come to naught."

"Oh!" he cried, with genuine regret, "was it really you that she intended to send?"

"It was really I," said Marian Day.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"If only I had known! Why wasn't there some kind fairy to whisper in my ear that that particular house party was really to be the house party of my life? Why — oh, why!"

And Marian echoed, "Why!"

The bay was growing restive and so was Roger. He cut in shortly:

"What brings you back to this part of the world, Waller? I thought you were far from here."

"So I was," came the answer, "but business compelled me to Cincinnati, and I thought I would run up here for the day just to say good-by to some of my dear friends. I left a card at your office somewhere."

"I didn't find it," said Roger, conscious of being churlish against his will, and hating himself for it. "Where are you off to now?"

"To Japan," replied Francis Waller, with his eyes still on Marian.

Her face changed oddly. She leaned toward him.

"Shall you be long gone?" she asked, quickly.

He was pleased, flattered, even touched a little by her most pronounced interest. Once more the color swept into his face.

"Very long," he responded, sadly. "A year or two, and possibly longer."

"How does the new book come on?" interrupted Roger again. "Hang it all," he was saying to himself

CIRCE

viciously, "what makes the fellow look at a woman like that?"

Francis Waller at once withdrew his eyes. After all, a beautiful woman was only of momentary importance to him. Art in the abstract, and his own art in particular, were supreme. His expression instantly grew serious, and his reply was amusingly naïve.

"Oh, it is coming along. It was a little late in getting into the publishers' hands, and they had made most of their arrangements for their autumn list, but, as one of the firm remarked to me, the morsel was too dainty a bit to be left over until next year. I am sure it is far the best piece of work I have sent forth; and in this estimate I think the public will agree with me — that is, if it has sufficiently recovered from its recent debauch, and is not too greatly contaminated by the cheap and sensational to know a good thing when it sees it. However, it will be out in November. I have given orders that a copy be sent to you. May I have the pleasure of sending one to you also?" he supplemented, addressing himself to Marian.

But Marian had grown inattentive. Her gaze had wandered away in the direction of the setting sun, and she appeared to be more interested in the benign and lovely aspect of the Bluegrass landscape than in anything the distinguished author had to say to her.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"That would be very good of you," she murmured. Her bow was a trifle absent-minded, and Roger, perceiving it with a sort of savage elation, made a movement of departure. He leaned forward quickly and held out his hand.

"Good-by, old fellow," he said, "we mustn't keep you standing here. Sorry to miss you when you called to-day. Good-by — and *bon voyage*."

Francis Waller coolly took out his note-book.

"What is your address?" he asked, with his eyes again on Marian's face, stepping back a little to avoid being trampled upon by Roger's impatient thoroughbred.

She hesitated and looked down. Then she slowly lifted her eyes to his and a peculiar smile flitted across her features, as the bay made a dash forward.

"My address? Oh, it doesn't matter. Just send it — send it in care of Mr. Bolling, and he will see that it gets to me," she called back to him.

He stood stock-still in the middle of the road. Presently he put his hat on his head and his pipe into his mouth, striking a match with his usual nonchalance. But the trap had disappeared below the crest of the hill he had a few moments before descended, before the look of wonderment in his eyes gave way to an expression of whimsical amusement. He took off his hat again and rubbed his hand across his brow,

CIRCE

tantalized by the reminder of something he was unable to run down. Marian Day! What strange mental association had he with that name? Where — when? Like a will-o'-the-wisp the memory eluded him. All at once he drew a deep breath, and threw back his head. He had it! “Ah!” he said to himself, “ah!” and laughed softly.

In the meantime Marian Day had promptly dismissed him from her thoughts, and was giving herself up to the man at her side with a concentration of her powers that made the incident of the moment before seem to him as if regarded as the merest bagatelle. His boyish irritation at her misdirected flattery, the slight stiffness of manner he had permitted himself for an instant to manifest toward her at recollection of her somewhat broadly expressed admiration of Waller — which had jarred not only upon his self-esteem but upon his high breeding — vanished like snow beneath a genial sun with the fostering warmth of her smile. Once more Roger felt himself to be the supreme object of her regard and was under the spell of her bewitching subtlety, the intoxication of her nearness.

It was growing late, yet he drove on and on, unmindful of the shadows ever deepening about them, or of the miles that lay between them and the now far

THE INVISIBLE BOND

distant town. The sun had gone down in roseate splendor, flooding the lovely land in an afterglow that lingered and blended with the autumnal haze in a delicious tender light. But now the clouds were paling, and behind delicate streaks of pearl and mauve a silver crescent shone, slender and beautiful. A sad, sweet stillness pervaded earth and sky, a stillness that was almost painful to the senses, and that was rudely broken in upon from time to time by some clattering vehicle hurrying with jaded occupants homeward and supperward after the long day. He seemed to see no one, to be scarcely conscious of the flying moments — of anything, in fact, save the magnetism of a presence that had made the past a blank to him and blinded him to the future.

For he had given up the fight. A madness of surrender urged him to put the goblet she held out to him to his lips, and to drink deep, deep of the sparkling draught within. A storm of excitement raged behind his few curt sentences. His eyes were hard and glassy, and now and then, in reply to her honeyed words, his laugh rang out short, unsteady, reckless. A cool little breeze was gathering, and he welcomed it against his hot brow, as it fluttered ghostlike through the misty woodlands. But nature was helpless to still the tempest that swept him onward now. His nerves were tense, and the dear familiar twilight sounds, ordinarily

C I R C E

music to his ears, had lost their power to soothe. The lowing of some Jerseys that they passed, the croaking of the frogs in a distant meadow, the shrill notes of katydid or cricket, jarred discordant. He kept his face resolutely from her — as if putting forth, unconsciously, one last despairing effort of resistance.

Once, just once, he had dared to look her in the eyes, and there was something half pleading and piteous in his expression as he turned his head quickly away.

Presently she touched him on the arm. She had been speaking very softly of her departure, with an infinite sadness and regret.

“We must go back now. It is almost quite dark.”

Her voice seemed to take on a mellowness that lent to it the quality of a flute note in an enchanted forest.

He looked about him as a man dazed.

“Yes,” he answered, hoarsely, “we must go back.”

All at once she pressed nearer to him and he could hear her quick, sob-like breathing. There were genuine tears in her eyes.

“But oh,” she said in a very low tone, so low that he had to bend down his head to hear it, “I wish, I wish we didn’t have to. If only we might go on like this forever!”

THE INVISIBLE BOND

He did not speak. But he flashed a quick, startled glance in her face. Their eyes met and his brain reeled. Before he had time to think he had yielded. She broke into a low, gurgling laughter, as he bent down to her. An instant afterward his arm was about her, and he had kissed her on the lips.

CHAPTER IX

THE AWAKENING

SEVERAL hours later Roger Bolling moved slowly up the path that led to his own doorway and applied the latch-key. His step was halting like an old man's, and his face was white and haggard as if a blight had suddenly fallen upon its young hopefulness, withering it, and leaving only dull despair in its stead. He entered softly, and stood a moment looking around upon the familiar objects with eyes that were glassy and unseeing, yet filled with a mute questioning. How long had it been since he stood there last? Was it days, or weeks, or months? It could scarcely have been hours. The house was entirely still, save for an occasional dismal scratching sound made by the Virginia creeper against the old-time casement when the wind stirred it. A dim light had been left burning in the hall for him, and it lit the dining-room sufficiently for him to see a little within. He knew without looking for it that on the sideboard he would find a tray filled with sandwiches and milk and fruits, which, with

THE INVISIBLE BOND

gentle forethought, his mother had placed there as usual for him with her own hands. He had tasted nothing since luncheon, yet the thought of food was revolting. Presently he started toward the staircase, and then paused again irresolute, as one dazed.

Out of the maddening play of the senses he had emerged at last. The intoxication that had blinded him, the storm that had swept and swayed and finally upturned him as the roots of a sapling are upturned by the blast — all, all were over now, and defeat, humiliation, dejection remained. One recollection, and one only, finally held him in its relentless grip, and it sobered him as a drunken man is sometimes sobered by a blow. It was the realization that he had bound himself, definitely, irrevocably — and to a woman whom, even in the delirium of surrender, he knew he did not love in any way that was worthy of his higher self. It was one way, but it was not the best way, and his heart cried out in bitterness and rebellion against the consequences of his own rash words and acts.

That first kiss in the twilight, wildly sweet, and hot with the headstrong passion of his unsullied youth, had become only a painful memory now; and with the waning of its power the reminder of other things that through it he had lost swept like an avalanche down upon him and crushed him beneath its intolerable

THE AWAKENING

weight. The sweet dream of an ideal marriage, which is the lofty hope of all fine natures, and which recently, and with boyish reverence, had sometimes floated before his enraptured eyes, was lost in the light of common day. Gone were the haunting visions, that like a flock of white-winged birds fluttered through his fancy at thought of some far distant time when Love, perchance, should lowly bend to him, and spirits as well as lips should dare to meet and mingle. His altar fires had grown cold.

Afterwards he could recall but little of what he had said to her. Much of the drive homeward would forever remain a blank to him. He only knew that out of the chaos that followed upon his impetuosity something within him whose roots reached deep down into his inmost nature sprang into life and bore fruit in the course he had felt in honor bound to pursue. He had asked her to be his wife. Even before he had done this she had assumed that the compact between them was already sealed. She was cheerfully but very quietly acquiescent, after the obligatory words had been spoken; and she drew a little away from him and sat looking out upon the purpling woods, her face turned toward the east, with a cool exultation in her eyes. But as the lovely form pressed once more against him at parting, her voice became again warm and vibrant, and she bent down to whisper in his ear words

THE INVISIBLE BOND

that, had he been truly her lover, would have set his pulses leaping in an ecstasy of joy.

After he had left her he had walked for miles, not knowing nor caring whither his footsteps tended, yet driven by the old blind savage instinct that makes the hurt animal seek to hide its pain from every other eye, and that always translates itself into a demand for solitude imperative and not to be denied. That there was any possible escape never for an instant occurred to him. He was brave, brave to the last extremity of valor; yet the old-fashioned chivalry of his nature would have revolted from the sort of courage that would have dared to tell her the truth. He knew now that she had deliberately tempted him, but there was a manliness in him of a kind that refused to throw the blame on her.

He went softly up the stairs, hoping that his mother would be sleeping, and cautious not to wake her. At thought of her a lump rose in his throat and a mist gathered in his eyes. How — how could he bare to tell her of the thing that was weighing him down! In the exquisite intimacy that existed between them, heretofore it had been possible for him to practise a noble frankness that was spontaneous and not in the least self-conscious; so that she fancied that she knew him through and through. Her ambition for him was boundless, he well knew — not in the usual vulgar

THE AWAKENING

way, the world's way, which she scorned, but as regarded everything that should tend toward his higher progress and development. Intuitively he apprehended what opinion she would hold of a marriage between him and Marian Day. There had been no adverse comment; even after the girl was no longer under her protection, and where some freedom of expression with regard to her might have been allowed, there had been only silence. But her silence had told him much; and now with that clearer perception that had come to him on his awakening from his midsummer madness, he realized as he had not done before what an impassable gulf of separation there must ever be between her and the woman who henceforth was to stand to him in the most sacred of human relations.

As he passed his mother's door, she called his name in her low voice, and he turned the knob and entered. It had been the custom of a lifetime, no matter how late the hour when he returned, for him to come in thus and speak a word or two. If she were sleeping he only kissed her on the brow and went away noiselessly. It was what he had thought to do to-night. It was after twelve, and her hour was eleven. He could not tell her yet! Not only her nerves but his own would need the bracing power of daylight for the ordeal that sooner or later he would have to inflict. To-night he would spare her. He had forced his

THE INVISIBLE BOND

features to something like their usual expression when he sat down on the bed beside her, but he was thankful for the deep shadows made by the little night lamp on the table at her side.

"Why aren't you asleep, motherkins?" he tried to ask lightly; "it is after twelve. Don't you know I don't allow you to keep late hours?"

She smiled softly, lingeringly, partly to him and partly to herself at his tone, as there came trooping into her mind countless recollections of the pretty tyrannies she had long been familiar with, and that dated in truth almost from his baby days. She was silent, and with a sudden movement he leaned toward her. Then he took her face in both his hands and kissed her twice tenderly, and there were tears in his eyes. A great longing to tell her everything, to loose the curb and make her the sharer of his sorrow, for an instant tempted him, as with an instinct that was childlike in its simplicity he turned to her for consolation. It passed. And as it gave way to another feeling, sterner, stronger, part of his youth went with it, and he knew that never again could he come to her or to any living soul for ease to the ache which his manhood demanded he must bear alone.

"Good night," he said, very gently, and sought to rise, but she drew him closer to her. For a moment she held him thus, patting his cheek with her firm,

THE AWAKENING

light hand, and pausing at last to put her lips to his brow. He noticed that she shivered convulsively, and there was a slight catch in her voice when she spoke at last.

“Don’t go, dear, not for a little while yet; there is something I want to say to you.”

He raised himself, and looked at her quickly. Until then he had avoided her eyes, but something in her tone fell strangely on his ear and startled him. Had she suspected anything? But the anxious, half-pleading look in his eyes, like that of a dumb animal in pain, gave way to a totally different expression. He started up. For the first time he realized that something was strangely wrong with her.

“What is it?” he asked, noting how white and hollow-cheeked she looked. A pang of remorse shot through him. How he had been neglecting her! “What is it you want to say to me, mother, dear?” His heart was pounding heavily.

She played a little with the bedspread and looked away.

“Nothing very — tedious. Just a wee little talk about — about my health — and one other thing.”

“Your health!” His eyes were still riveted upon her, and his voice rang out tense and quivering with alarm. He remembered that her hand when it had touched his face had seemed to him hot as in a fever,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

but he had been too overwrought fully to realize what that might mean at first, self-conscious as he had been. His gaze wandered helplessly about the room, its daintiness and refinement, that air of elegance that pervaded everything in any way associated with his mother, notwithstanding that her surroundings were of the simplest, forcing itself upon his attention even then. All at once he broke forth.

"Oh!" he cried, "you have been ill, and you didn't even tell me!"

"But I am better to-night," she answered, softly, "and there was no need to alarm you. The doctor came at half-past five. He says that I am better, too. Don't worry, darling."

"The doctor! At half-past five!"

Roger turned his face away and groaned inwardly. He took a turn or two up and down the room. Then he came back and sat down on the bed beside her. There was an intensity of self-repression written on every line of his pale face, but his manner was calm and a little imperious.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked.

She hesitated. "I haven't been quite well for — for some time."

"For some time! And you didn't even tell me!" His voice tried to be steady, but it broke again, and his lip trembled.

THE AWAKENING

She took his hand in both her own and held it fondly for a moment, soothing him as if he were a child. Then she pressed it against her cheek and looked into his eyes, smiling. But his sensitive perception had now fully grasped what she was striving to keep from him — that she was really ill, perhaps seriously. With the realization of the need of self-control, the necessity, possibly, of prompt and efficient action, he awoke sternly to the demands of the situation. All at once they seemed to change places, and he was the elder. He looked her very quietly in the eyes, and his fingers tightened about hers.

“Now, dear,” he said, “what is it? Tell me — tell me everything.”

She turned her face away for the briefest possible space. Then she told him.

He sat as one stunned. “But Dr. Beverley is not infallible. He has been known to make mistakes. I will call in other physicians,” he cried at last, with sudden vehemence, rousing himself from the blow that had felled him. His face was seamed with suffering. He reached out his hands as if groping in the dark.

She shook her head. “He has consulted with others. The examination shows that there are tuberculosis germs. They are all agreed that I have the disease, but as yet in only its earliest stage. They hold out considerable hope. I am to do certain things, and not

THE INVISIBLE BOND

to do others. For one thing I am not to worry the least little bit — which is the sort of advice that every one gives and that no one at all times keeps — and — and, let me see — I am to be much in the open air, and you are to take me driving every day.”

“Oh!” he cried — “oh!” and covered his face with his hands, heart-broken and unable to speak another word, as there swept over him the maddening recollection of other companionship he had sought, forgetful of her in the drives he had taken through the summer.

“You know how I hate to go with you,” she said, playfully and quickly, divining the cause of his pain. “That terrible horse of yours!”

He raised his head, slightly comforted.

“Are you really afraid of it still?”

“Horribly. I agree with the psalmist that ‘an horse is a vain thing for safety.’”

“But it is perfectly gentle. You could almost drive it yourself now.”

She broke into a cheerful little laugh. “I shouldn’t like to try. Sometimes when I have seen you starting off I have half wished that dear old farmer friend of yours had presented you with a cow.”

“But I couldn’t possibly drive a cow,” said Roger, with a wan smile, striving piteously to meet her mood.

“It would be much safer,” she answered, with gentle teasing.

THE AWAKENING

She lay quite still for a moment, and then breathed a deep sigh.

"You can't think what a relief it is now that you know. The thought that I had to tell you has been over me day and night. It was making me sleepless and iller than I need have been, and to-day Dr. Beverley suspected, and made me promise that I would talk to you as soon as you came in. You see it isn't very serious, after all."

There was a long silence. He wanted to encourage her, to help her to maintain the cheerful view which, in his ignorance of the disease, seemed to him a healthful sign and the one straw of hope left to him to clutch to. But he couldn't speak. There was a lump in his throat, and his heart was like lead within him.

Presently a clock in a church steeple sounded the hour of one, the single stroke ringing out in solemn reverberation over the sleeping town. He half started up, and then sat down again.

"But there is something else?" he said.

"Yes; there is something else."

He waited. A tremor of excitement swept through her, and her eyes grew troubled and faltered.

"I believe I am half afraid of you, you dear big thing. To think I ever held you — the whole of you — in my arms!"

Still he waited. His own breath was coming hard.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

He thought he knew of what she was about to speak to him, and his heart recoiled in anguish. He bowed his head.

“Roger, it is about your grandfather. I want you to go to see him,” she said, at length, with a sob in her voice. “I know that you think he has been cruel — cruel, and it is hard for you to forgive; you are so proud. It was hard for your father, and you are like him, so like him that you almost startled me when you first came in to-night.”

She lay studying her son's face, its high-bred contours, the stag-like poise of the head, the swift, varying expression in the dark gray eyes; and there swept over her, as it had done a thousand times recently, a poignant dread, as she realized, apart from prejudice, its strength and lovableness, its quality of charm that gave a certain picturesqueness to his simplest action. But her tact was of the finest, and she gave no voice to the secret anxiety that she kept deep down in her heart. She could even bring herself to speak to him on the subject which, by mutual but unspoken agreement, had not been mentioned between them for years — but not that. His love affairs were his own.

“I dislike to ask you, dear. But I know you will not refuse me,” she said, presently.

He ran his hand wearily across his brow. Then it was not that.

THE AWAKENING

"I have been to see him," he said, slowly, at last. "He was not there. He had gone East to consult a specialist."

She looked at him in astonishment. "You have been!" she cried.

"I promised — Judge Fontaine."

Her expression changed from wonderment to satisfaction. But she only said very quietly:

"He has just returned. I should like you to go again, if you will, to-morrow, or if not then, the first day that you can. Roger, you will do this for me?"

He did not answer. But as she turned a troubled, half timid look upon him, he bent down and folded his arms about her in an agony of apprehension and of regret.

"Oh, dear, dear, dearest," he cried, "I will. There is nothing on earth I wouldn't do for you. I would give my life for you, if it would do you any good. Try, try to believe I would!"

CHAPTER X

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

It was Sunday morning a few days later and the Beverleys were at breakfast. They lived in a large red-brick house with tall gray pillars and a high porch in front, that stood some distance back from the street and was on a line with the home of Colonel Theophilus Hart and of Judge Jeremiah Fontaine.

Nine o'clock had just sounded, and breakfast was being served an hour later than on week-days, a concession that was always welcomed with delight from Judith to the youngest. There were five children in all, and as each had come straggling into the library a few moments before, a short, stout gentleman with a smooth face and a sparsely covered head, sitting in an armchair near the window, laid down his morning paper, smiled cheerily over his gold-rimmed spectacles, and pursed up his lips to be kissed. Upon their steps, followed by the negro butler, came Mrs. Beverley in an elaborate morning gown of pale lavender silk with knots of purple velvet and a flowing train that swept

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

grandly behind her; and at sight of her Dr. Beverley arose with all the alertness his stiffening joints would allow, and stood bowing as before a queen. Then the procession had filed into the dining-room with a ceremony that was somewhat amusingly in contrast with the freedom of behavior that marked the entrance of the young people into their father's presence before the arrival of their more august parent.

Dr. Beverley was a philosopher, fortunately for him and for his household. There is a type of man whom Mrs. Beverley would have driven to desperation with her self-centered, unceasing demands, her determination to be always elegant, and her pain at the slightest infringement upon the rules of life and conduct which she had rigidly laid down. But there existed between the two a harmony that was seldom disturbed; and in yielding to her in all the small things of life he manifested the large tolerance that makes a man none the less the master in moments of important decision. She was thirty-two when he married her, a widow, childless, still handsome, and very much sought after, though not always with motives so worthy as were the doctor's. It had been a love match, in spite of many seeming incongruities; and he had remained her lover throughout a married life of three-and-twenty years.

If ever a man's calling was stamped upon him, Dr. Beverley wore the marks of his. His pale gray eyes,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

keen, sympathetic, discerning, possessing a power of penetrative insight that seemed at times almost clairvoyant, were a physician's eyes, the eyes of one who had looked long upon disease and death and suffering, it is true, yet, by a certain wholesome process of readjustment, a nice balancing of the forces that upbuild with those that destroy, had at last attained a hopeful peace: the humble equipoise, in part divine, that comes to those who have known the joy of healing. His loose, baggy trousers, his soft silk tie and wide-brimmed hat, sometimes gave an impression of comicality to those who saw him for the first time. But it vanished speedily on acquaintance; and no one who had once seen him at the bedside of the truly ailing ever again felt disposed to laugh at any eccentricity of his. There, he was no longer a queer little man with an irascibility that occasionally wrestled with his ordinary cordial good-humor and overthrew it, but a giant who brought calm and reassurance with his mere presence.

As he entered the dining-room he still held in one hand the newspaper which he had not finished reading. On sitting down he had first carefully folded it in a peculiar oblong shape, and then laid it on the table at his side, not, however, daring to take it up again, although his glance fell rather longingly upon it once or twice after he had finished his cantaloupe.

Judith sat next to him, and she watched him with

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

a merry twinkle in her eyes. Presently she bent down and examined the part of the paper that was uppermost. The name of a well-known society reporter glared at her from the headlines.

"What is Rosalie Raymond dilating upon to-day?" she asked, with a slightly sarcastic inflection, not, however, intended for her father, whose curious interest in other people's affairs she shared and fostered, being ever ready dutifully to give him the benefit of her own superior and extensive knowledge with regard to the latest happenings of the town. As a matter of fact, the doctor was as gossipy as an old woman; and he was only prevented by professional demands from devouring daily and with keenest relish the personal notes and comments that took up a large portion of the space of the local newspapers.

He scowled a little impatiently, stirred his coffee with an air of preoccupation, and compelled her to repeat the question.

Judith was not easily disconcerted. Moreover, she began to suspect that there was something in that particular chronicle which she had not seen, of special importance, possibly of individual concern, and that her father was eager to impart it, being only restrained by her mother's unrelenting exaction with reference to the proper decorum and topics to be made use of at meal times.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"I don't see what she finds to write about. Nothing ever happens in this dull old town," she remarked, with the deliberate purpose of drawing him out.

The doctor's glance wandered the length of the table, and rested upon one after another of his hungry progeny, lingering finally with Mrs. Beverley in a sort of shamefaced inquiry. But the suave features gave no sign.

"I should say that she finds a good deal," he answered, helping himself to another choice bit of broiled chicken, and allowing himself to skirt with careful agility about the tempting subject, keeping always a watchful eye upon his wife. "She appears to be in a particularly felicitous mood this morning, and she is simply bubbling over with merriment like a happy child. There is never anything barbed in her pleasantries."

A slender blonde boy at the far end of the table looked up from his plate.

"Isn't there?" he inquired, sardonically. "You just wait until her bow is aimed at you."

Judith regarded him coolly for an instant. "Oh, that's because she called you a boy the other day, and you want to be treated as a decrepit old man with a crutch and a cane," she observed, with a shrug.

The boy knew better than to reply, but his face flushed. He was next in point of age to Judith,

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

although her junior by four years. He was a handsome lad of seventeen, or thereabout, very much like his mother, and distinctly her favorite of all her children. He went on eating in sullen silence, and the doctor, ignoring the slight interruption, began again.

"She is a most remarkable young woman, and she is always entertaining. I am confident that her pen alone does more to attract subscribers to the paper than the entire force combined. It was not for naught that I brought her safely through the whooping-cough and the measles and the rest of her childish disorders."

Mrs. Beverley coughed elegantly.

"Is there — ahem — is there anything of special interest that she has to relate this morning? Otherwise I think we would better speak of something else."

The doctor looked mysterious.

"Just as you please, my dear. But there was — one thing."

A gleam of curiosity shone in Mrs. Beverley's eyes. She raised herself slightly and sat waiting, a reposeful figure, yet expectant. But the doctor now appeared disposed to let the topic fall.

"Who is that young woman who is staying at Tim Caldwell's?" he asked, with seeming irrelevance.

"An adventuress," cut in Judith, shortly.

Mrs. Beverley was amiably annoyed. Judith's bluntness and indiscretion of speech were things that

THE INVISIBLE BOND

she found it impossible to reconcile herself to. The fact that the girl disdained all polish was something that she had learned to face, gradually, and after countless failures in the attempt to mold her into something that she at last realized her eldest daughter could never be. But that the two younger girls, children though they still were, should have before them constantly an example of such daring disregard of all her precepts threatened a state of things for the future that she by no means relished. In the meantime the two sons, the elder in particular, were her hope and her consolation.

"An adventuress, is she?" inquired the doctor, gravely. "I am sorry for that, very sorry for that, indeed." He was silent for a moment, as if weighing the matter with all seriousness from a varied point of view. "She is a strikingly beautiful person, but not — not altogether pleasing. I have met her driving with young Bolling a number of times recently, sometimes far from home, and I have wanted to shoo them back to town. I don't like that young woman's face, and I have an idea that Mrs. Bolling wouldn't fancy it any more than I do. How much longer is she to remain here?"

Mrs. Beverley turned to her youngest daughter, whose eyes were wide and wondering.

"Eat your waffle, darling, it is getting cold," she commanded, with difficulty restraining her amusement,

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

which ventured to break forth into one of her prolonged spells of laughter at sight of the child's interested but bewildered expression. Then she looked toward the doctor.

"Mrs. Caldwell's guest, do you mean? She is to remain some time longer, I believe. Mrs. Caldwell told me in a shop yesterday that there was an epidemic of diphtheria or something in Jefferson County where Miss Day teaches school, and she thought it would be dangerous for her to return."

"Humph!" replied the doctor, shortly. "It may be even more dangerous for her to remain."

He sat tapping with one fat forefinger upon the table-cloth. He had forgotten all about his breakfast, and his mind was busy with the solution of a problem that had given him no little anxiety of late, the problem of the secret sorrow that seemed to be at the root of Mrs. Bolling's illness.

"How is Mrs. Bolling?" his wife asked, seeing his disturbed looks, and beginning to realize at last that there was something back of his seemingly idle questioning.

The doctor ran his hand wearily across his brow. "Worse, very much worse," he said, briefly. Then his eyes fell upon the paper again at his side, and regardless of disapproval he snatched it up and turned to a short notice.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

“Can any of you tell me who is meant by this?” he demanded. He pronounced the words very slowly and distinctly, first adjusting his eyeglasses with great deliberation. He read:

“‘One of the most interesting of the numerous matrimonial rumors afloat concerns a beautiful auburn-haired young woman, who has been for the past six weeks a guest of this place, and a handsome young attorney of distinguished pedigree, who is very much liked both in social and professional circles. This column does not venture to be more explicit, but, in reference to the happy bridegroom that is to be, it may be suggestive to say that an excellent model doubtless lurks for him in one of his initials — which is the name of a certain diligent and much lauded insect of whose virtues his success gives evidence of imitation.’”

As in sonorous tones the paragraph rolled from the doctor's lips, Judith's face blanched. She sat clutching her napkin in her lap, twisting it into a number of vicious little folds, but she dared not trust herself to speak. With the usual injustice of the shallow-hearted, after the first shock of surprise and angry disappointment had subsided, she had transferred her emotion from the real cause to the person merely indirectly associated with her pain; and had the power of an ancient queen been hers, and had the bearer of such

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

unpleasant tidings been brought into her presence, it assuredly had fared ill with the society reporter in that moment.

But she was saved from the awkwardness of the situation by a diversion. A servant entered with a telephone message for the doctor. The case was urgent. The doctor pushed back his plate, murmured an apology, and left at once.

Half an hour afterwards Judith was walking quickly down the little gravel foot-path toward the gate. With one hand she held up the skirt of her white lawn gown, and with the other she grasped the handle of a large wicker basket filled with fruit which she had herself selected from the pantry's abundance with most particular care. The September sun shone gloriously, but now and then a searing leaf was blown across the lawn, and at sight of it, Judith, who was not ordinarily given to a discernment of the symbolic in the manifestations of nature, being of the prosaic type to which the primrose by the river's brim might suggest a becoming color for a ball gown, but scarcely anything more serious, set her teeth together and choked back the tears that sprang into her eyes. By a thoroughly commonplace association of ideas the thought of withered hopes and withered leaves became entangled, so that it was not until she had reached her

THE INVISIBLE BOND

destination, a small one-story brick building a short distance up the street, that she was able to force her features into their usual expression of half stolid unconcern.

She was bent upon a somewhat difficult mission, and one that a more sensitive nature would have shrunk from. But she was not one to suffer the agony of uncertainty while there were any possible means of relief. Hers were not to be the midnight vigils born of suspense, if she could help it; and she was of the opinion that she could help it by a few well chosen inquiries directed to the author of that most disturbing notice. Doubtless, she decided, there was no truth in it, and it was only one of those daring newspaper announcements that are sometimes made at the sacrifice of the individual for the sake of a sensation. Rosalie Raymond was quite equal to that, she believed.

Miss Raymond was at home, the servant informed her, and would see Miss Beverley on the porch.

Judith, still clutching her basket of fruit, and with a slightly quickening heart-throb, followed the negro maid through the dimly lighted hall, and was ushered out upon a comfortable veranda, shady with vines, and furnished like a little sitting-room, where there were rugs and cool, inviting-looking chairs, a sofa with pillows, and a table in the center strewn with books.

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

In a hammock at the far end of the porch a young woman lay with magazines and newspapers to the right and left of her. She was a very pretty young woman, rosy-cheeked, brown-eyed, brown-haired, with a sweetly innocent little laugh that somewhat belied the caustic pen she wielded. At sight of Judith and her burden a ripple of merriment swept across her face, and the very apt quotation, "I fear the Greeks when they come bringing gifts," flashed into her mind. But she held out a thoroughly cordial hand. She made an effort to rise and half a dozen magazines tumbled to the floor, but left her still entangled.

"You see I can't give you a decent welcome," she said, as she struggled to her feet.

"Oh, don't bother," replied Judith, with a shrug. "You know I don't go in for ceremony; I have enough of that sort of thing at home." She put down her basket. "I have brought you some fruit. These pears are delicious; I ate three at breakfast. I thought you might like to have some."

The tone was entirely matter-of-fact, and it was even a trifle misleading. Miss Raymond was half ashamed of herself. Yet she found it a little difficult to be persuaded into the belief that Judith's appearance on that particular morning prognosticated nothing.

She was a young woman who had taken up journalism

THE INVISIBLE BOND

as a fad and was pursuing it as a necessity; only she would have said that it was pursuing her. Well-born, well-read, distinctly clever, she had soon wearied of society as an aim and sought another outlet for her pent-up energies and nimble wits. For a while it had rather entertained her to send to the local newspapers desultory sketches of passing events, worked up with considerable selective ability and expressed with a certain dash and daring, coupled with discretion, that made her a valuable acquisition to an editor. But there had come a reversal of fortune, and with the absolute need for its continuance, her zest for her work had vanished. She had grown to loathe it. It had given her, it is true, a knowledge of human nature which, without its assistance, she might have been years in acquiring. But it was the sort of knowledge she would rather not have had. Already that particular notice was weighing heavily upon her conscience. She hated the very wording of it; she hated the whole tiresome thing. What was it to her who was married or to be given in marriage? And why all this ceaseless twaddle about the inane affairs of people for whom she didn't care a straw? It seemed to her, as she pondered, an unworthy pandering to the low curiosity of the vulgar; and more than once the proud face of Roger Bolling, flushed, indignant, had come before her, sternly demanding explanation of her unwarrantable

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

liberty with his name. And yet — was she not privileged in this instance?

Judith was sitting on the edge of her chair, as if intending to leave immediately, her errand having been accomplished. She gave an approving glance around.

"You certainly are very comfortable here," she observed in a low tone that was intended to be conciliatory, but somehow fell just a little short of compliment, owing to a characteristic defect that made the critical her more natural form of expression.

Rosalie Raymond coughed softly. She was beginning to be entertained. Her keen insight had given her a knowledge of her fellow-being that had left her, in the main, pitying rather than contemptuous. Judith was not at all difficult, ordinarily. Nor was she particularly appealing. But to-day there was that in her clumsiness that seemed touching.

"Comfortable, am I?" she echoed. "But it is what you are not. Do lean back a little, Judith. You look as if you had not a proper appreciation of my pretty pink pillows. Your mother never touches the back of her chair, I know, but she is of the old régime, and we — alas, we are the degenerates. I can't have too many soft cushions about me, and I delight in eider-down, and all that it stands for."

"But I really can't stay," said Judith; "and it is time for you to dress for church."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Don't think me quite a heathen, but I am not going to church. I am too horribly tired."

"I don't wonder," assented Judith, sympathetically.

"Yesterday was a most overwhelmingly busy day. I had half a dozen things to report, and there were innumerable small items which I had to record."

"But you don't have to be particularly accurate, do you, when writing up the small notices?"

"Oh, yes. The small ones are quite as important as the large ones; sometimes a little more so."

"But I mean —" Judith stumbled, but regained her equilibrium — "oh, I just mean about rumors and things like that. You don't, of course, try to be strictly accurate when mentioning matters that are merely hearsay, do you?"

"Yes; I always try to be accurate, and I seldom mention matters that are merely hearsay."

Judith's eyes grew round and a faint color crept into her cheeks. She opened her mouth to speak and then closed it again. She was breathing quickly.

Rosalie Raymond's eyes were downcast. She lay toying with the fringe on her hammock. She did not appear to take the smallest notice of the girl's agitation, but one swift glance out of her heavily fringed lashes had told her the whole pathetic story.

"You see, I simply have to be always strictly accurate, to use your phrase," she said. Her voice had

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

grown very kind. "If I were not, I might possibly get the paper into all sorts of trouble, and, of course, I should dislike to do anything like that. Then, for purely selfish reasons, I do not want to make any blunders; I have my little prides and ambitions. And I also have a conscience, though there be some who are disposed to doubt that. I confess that it is not always at peace, in spite of my boasted exactness."

Judith sat bolt upright. With an impatient movement she freed herself from the all-encompassing pillows. She flung one to the extreme end of the sofa.

"This thing is making me so hot!" she exclaimed, irritably. She slowly drew on her gloves. Then she rose, hearkening to the church bells. "I am afraid I am going to be too late," she said. "If I guess," she added, carelessly, "who was meant by your reference to 'the little busy bee,' will you tell me whether I am right or not?"

Rosalie Raymond hesitated for the briefest possible space.

"I will," she answered, looking away.

"You meant Marjorie Randall and Howard Bloomfield, of course."

"But Mr. Bloomfield is not 'a handsome young attorney of distinguished pedigree,' and Miss Randall is not 'a beautiful visitor with auburn locks.'"

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Then it is that little red-haired Miss Earlston, of Philadelphia, and Bernard Grayson. He certainly is a lawyer, and one of his initials is B."

"No, no. You are wrong again. I give you one more guess."

Judith looked thoughtful for a moment, and finally shook her head.

"I am afraid I shall have to give it up," she said. Two bright little spots burned in her cheeks, and her voice broke a little. "Perhaps, if I could stay longer I might think of the right ones, but that is the last bell, and I have to go. I was never very good at guessing."

But Rosalie Raymond knew that Judith had already guessed. After she had gone, she leaned toward the table that was beside her hammock, and from one of the books in which she had hurriedly placed it she took forth a letter, which she had been re-reading when Judith's name was brought to her. It was in a light-blue envelope, and was addressed in a bold, would-be-fashionable handwriting, a rather aggressive monogram adorning the sheet within. It ran:

"MY DEAR MISS RAYMOND, — You asked me to let you know when I should leave Lexington, and I am going to make you the sharer of my happy secret to the extent of saying that I have decided to remain indefinitely. Mr. Bolling and I are not quite ready

JUDITH ATTEMPTS A RUSE

for any formal announcement of our engagement as yet — in fact we have not even discussed the matter of the announcement at all, having, as you will, of course, readily understand, more absorbing subjects just now to entertain us. But I realize how much it must be to a reporter to be the first to make mention of any item of interest, and therefore if, without calling any names, and merely by way of innuendo, you should care to make a reference to what I have told you, you may feel privileged to do so. I know that you will do this in your own brilliant and charming style, and that you will be glad to have me take you, in this friendly way, into my confidence. Believe me, with warm appreciation of the many delightful and flattering things you have already said of me,

Very cordially yours,

MARIAN DAY.

CHAPTER XI

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

ON the same Sunday morning Roger had waked out of a troubled sleep, and was startled to find that the day was already far advanced. All through the early hours of the night he had tossed, brain-racked and well-nigh distracted, his mind grappling, as on the several nights previous, with the hard realities that confronted him, and knowing them even more implacable than when first encountered. His mother's serious illness, hitherto unsuspected, followed him like a specter. There was no escape from it, and it added a new and appalling condition to a situation already sufficiently difficult; so that to inflict upon her now the crushing fact of his engagement seemed a brutality that he could not for an instant consider. And yet, how could he hope long to keep it from her? Every wind that blew would waft to her the story of his fatal blunder. She would hear it in the careful avoidance of her friends as well as in the unrestrained reference of more thoughtless persons. Above all,

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

she would hear it in his own tender, remorseful solicitude, as he sought to shield her with unceasing care. For upon one thing he was sternly determined; that he would devote himself to her with an assiduity which, for the present, should admit of no conflicting claim. It was the only concession he could make, the only atonement he could offer. His honor, deep-rooted, instinctive — embryonic as yet with regard to the conception of the sanctity of the marriage relation — was unrelenting in the elementary acceptance of the irrevocableness of his compact.

But, though there was relief for him in that decision, he was still far too perturbed to sleep, and it was not till long after midnight that he had sunk into a sort of semi-conscious state in which vague, confusing images floated slowly before his eyes, now alluring, now menacing, while all the time there sounded a faint dirge-like monotone, to the accompaniment of which his soul seemed ever slipping down, down into an unknown and fathomless abyss.

At last he had fallen into the deep sleep of exhaustion, and finally he had dreamed. The ocean was all about him, and he was on a burning ship from which there was no escape. In the midst of the pandemonium of shrieks and curses, the frenzy of desperation on every side, now and then a voice would be raised in prayer, and gradually the realization would be borne

THE INVISIBLE BOND

in upon him that it was his own voice, beseeching Heaven for others and for himself; and then, as he stood, keeping his eyes turned resolutely upward despite the horror, sometimes he would see a spirit take its flight and, longing unspeakably to follow, would know that he could not, because his time had not yet come. His it was to wait, and wait, and wait, while the demoniac flames writhed, and leaped, and crackled, and the sea grew grim and terrible beneath the awful red light. At length a loud report echoed over the heaving waters; the ship seemed to pause an instant, and then a mighty shiver shook it, and it rocked and trembled like a thing alive and in agony. Then it began slowly to sink. But when he opened his eyes again and turned for a last look about him a shock of surprise went through him; for it seemed that he had been all along almost in sight of land. The ship had drifted to harbor and he was the last one left aboard. On the shore a white-robed figure stood reaching out lovely, beseeching arms. As he gazed the figure grew distinct, then beautiful, then familiar. With a low cry he sprang into the waves. He woke with a start, a name still lingering on his lips. For the face was one that he must not remember, and the name was the name of Sibyl Fontaine.

He lay for a moment unable to grasp the actual, dazed, and quivering in every nerve. His eyes still

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

held the look of awe and rapture that had sprung into them just before he waked. But as there rushed over him the acute consciousness of his present misery, heightened in that instant by contrast with the ultimate peace of his dream, a wave of despair swept over him, and at thought of what he had lost of the best of life a stifled groan broke from him and he buried his face in the pillow.

But he had grown outwardly calm when he came down-stairs a few moments later, and as usual he had forced his features to an expression that concealed his inward perturbation, when he sought his mother's presence. He had dressed hurriedly, disturbed that he had kept her waiting.

But she was not sitting in her accustomed seat by the window as he had thought she should be; nor was she anywhere around. With quickly beating heart he was starting up-stairs again when a servant met him with a note — a few hurried words which she had scribbled in pencil to tell him that she had not slept well during the night and was then feeling a little drowsy, so that she would not join him at breakfast. She expressed the wish that he would take that morning to make another attempt to see his grandfather, the visit of a day or two before having failed of its purpose, and suggested that he go a few moments before church time.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

There was something urgent in her insistence, despite the playfulness and the airy grace of the note — so characteristic of her that even in that moment he was conscious of its elegance — something that seemed to imply a reason for haste; and with a sickening dread Roger took out a card and wrote his answer.

“Give that to her,” he said, “if she should wake before I return.”

He rang for James, and then again wandered into the little drawing-room and sat down beside his mother’s chair. The morning newspapers were lying on the table, and as he waited for his breakfast to be served in the adjoining room, mechanically he picked up the one that happened to be uppermost. He ran carelessly over the headlines, and then, as James was slow, he opened the paper and glanced down the inner portions. By the merest chance, for he did not share Dr. Beverley’s interest in the personal affairs of his neighbors, his eye was caught by something on Rosalie Raymond’s page. An instant afterward he drew in his breath, and a smothered exclamation broke from him. Then he slowly, as if weighing every word, re-read the notice relating to himself and Marian Day.

For a long time he sat perfectly still, holding the paper in his hand, and thinking deeply. Then the indignation in his face gave way to another expression — an expression of intensest shame. A horrible suspicion

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

had flashed into his mind, and it had left him completely crushed and humiliated. For it was something that even in his most secret thoughts he could not quite bring himself to formulate.

With an abrupt gesture he rose and, crumpling the paper in his hands, flung it into the grate. Then he put a match to it, and stood grimly watching it as it crisped and burned.

Half an hour afterwards he was on his way to his grandfather's, the painful tension he had been under finding a certain relief in movement, and in the thought that he was obeying his mother's most earnest desire. The dread which ordinarily he would have felt of the encounter, and which he had been conscious of on each of the two former occasions when he had sought an interview with the stern old soldier who had maintained through all the years such an unrelenting attitude toward his mother and himself, was overbalanced by other emotions far more potent and disturbing.

So far as he himself was concerned he cared little for the outcome. His grandfather had never been aught to him but a stranger, and he felt no disposition to heal the breach that had been of Colonel Hart's own making. But for his mother's sake he did hope that he would to some extent be able to bring about the reconciliation she longed for. To do this he was well

THE INVISIBLE BOND

aware that he must be circumspect and submissive to a degree far beyond what was usually manifest in his deportment, and that he must under no conditions declare himself with regard to his own private views on the subject of the Civil War.

As Roger went quickly up the flight of steps leading into the picturesque, white-pillared mansion, an old negro who was busy in the hall came forward and stood bowing, with his feather duster in his hand.

"He feelin' mighty poo'ly, but I 'spec' he'll see you," he remarked in reply to Roger's inquiry. "I done tole him you come day befo' yistiddy, an' he sot right still a long time an' den he say, 'Ef he comes ag'in,' dem was he ve'y words, an' no mistake, he say, 'Ef he comes ag'in you may ax him in, Lish,' an' he made me go and git dat cyard o' yourn, an' he got it now a-stickin' in de side o' his shavin' stan'."

The old darky was plainly agitated. Being one of the ancient retainers of the house, there were few of its secrets that he was not acquainted with, and he knew that the occasion was momentous. He gave Roger a sly encouraging wink as he ushered him into the hall.

"I done fixed him he mint julep," he said, significantly.

The hall was long and wide, and it was interesting with dim old family portraits and relics of pioneer,

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

and Revolutionary, and Colonial days. A hat-rack composed of a stand on which rested an elk's head of carved wood surmounted by a superb pair of antlers was near the entrance, and as Roger paused an instant before it there flashed into his mind the memory of a day two-and-twenty years before when his mother had brought him for the first time to see his grandfather, on one of the only two visits she had ever dared to pay him since her marriage. He could never afterwards recall which bore the more important place in his recollection, the elk or his grandfather. Each had seemed equally formidable; and though by no means a timid child, the stormy scene he had then been a witness to seemed to justify the feeling that had been awakened and the mental association which long had lingered with him.

On the right of the hall were the long drawing-rooms of his mother's girlhood, furnished in the fashion of the sixties, with beflowered velvet carpets, carved rosewood and satin damask, and white marble mantelpieces. As he looked within, a full-length portrait of the slender girl of those days, dressed in the flowing garments of the period and standing beside a rose-covered trellis, looked forth at him from the shadows with eyes of shy inquiry, so like and yet so unlike his mother's.

After a while came the impatient click of a cane in

THE INVISIBLE BOND

the hall and the sound of feeble footsteps. Roger rose, unconsciously straightening himself to his full height and standing with head thrown back.

Was he coming in peace or with the sword? he asked himself half humorously, as he waited.

There were a few words outside spoken in a deep bass voice as to an attendant, and an instant afterward the door was flung wide and a tall old gentleman of a somewhat ruddy countenance, with white hair and moustache, and an air of great dignity, stood leaning upon his carved ivory-headed cane in the doorway. He was very handsomely and carefully dressed, and his long frock-coat was buttoned about his straight military form as smoothly as if he were a figure in wax designed to display the skill of a tailor. He stood perfectly still for a moment, surveying his grandson under his shaggy brows with an expression of very keen and earnest inquiry.

The look in his cold gray eyes softened a little as he came forward. He moved slowly, unsteadily, as if every step were costing him a painful effort, and Roger, realizing for the first time what a very old man his grandfather was, sprang forward and wheeled the armchair into position, touched in spite of himself.

"It is very kind of you to see me," he said, with simple sincerity as he grasped the hand out-stretched to him.

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

Colonel Theophilus Hart sat down, letting himself with difficulty sink into the same large leathern chair in the chimney corner in which he had sat on that memorable day when Roger, a child of six, saw him for the first time.

There was a moment's awkward silence in which each seemed measuring the other's strength, and again the proud face of the elder underwent a curious change. His manner, though distant, was extremely courteous, and, though watchful, it was most surprisingly respectful.

"I was told of your former visit," he said, at length, with his eyes still on the young man's face.

"It was not my first effort to see you," replied Roger, very quietly, "I have been here twice recently."

"Twice?"

Colonel Hart waited inquiringly, his haughty spirit, however, disdaining to manifest greater interest in the announcement than if it had been made to him by the veriest stranger.

"I was here one morning in July," remarked Roger, in the same deferential but direct voice with which he had first spoken. The tone was manly, entirely innocent of the bumptiousness of youth — a trait that the colonel particularly abhorred — and it was not too conciliatory.

Colonel Hart reflected a moment. "Ah, that was

THE INVISIBLE BOND

during my absence in the East," he replied, at length.

"Was it an enjoyable trip that you had?" asked Roger, a little stiffly, beginning to find conversation with his grandfather anything but easy, and wishing that he were safely through with the hard mission which he had come upon.

"Enjoyable?" The sternness in the strong face gave way to sadness, and an unspeakable loneliness brooded in the downcast eyes. But presently, with a gesture that seemed to hurl defiance at age and even death itself, the drooping head was raised. "Enjoyable?" he repeated. "There is not much that is still enjoyable to the man who has more than lived out the allotted span; and like old Barzillai I may well ask, 'Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?' But I am no longer seeking enjoyment of life. I went East to consult a physician; and it was a fool's errand to a fool."

"I am very sorry that you were not benefited," said Roger, kindly.

The colonel's eyes flashed. "Benefited, sir?" I did not expect to be benefited; I went merely to gratify a whim of my old friend Walter Beverley, not because I have an atom of respect for doctors and their physic — a damn set of humbugs in my opinion, the last one of them — except Beverley himself."

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

"My mother has the utmost confidence in Dr. Beverley," said Roger, plunging with a little break in his voice into the subject which he had only been awaiting the opportunity to touch upon. "I am sorry to say that she has had much need of his services recently. Her health has failed rapidly."

"Ah!"

There was mingled distress and resentment in the smothered ejaculation that broke from the aged lips.

There was a courage in the way Roger threw back his head and looked his grandfather in the face that was oddly suggestive of the old man's undaunted spirit. It was the same blood, hot, impulsive, daring, that had refused pardon to his mother, that now in her child rose majestic, sternly demanding for her what was her due. He realized he was about to do it all in a totally different way from the way he had intended, but an irresistible wave of feeling drove him on. He went straight to the point.

"Perhaps I should say, in explanation of my presence here, if any explanation is needed," he said, "that I have come to you in my mother's behalf. She is ill — seriously — and she asks a reconciliation."

The colonel's face was tremulous with excitement and two bright red spots burned in his cheeks. His eyes shifted their gaze a little, but they held an unwilling

THE INVISIBLE BOND

admiration. A low ground-swell of anger shook his voice.

"Your mother was the favorite of all my children. One after another the others died and left me until I had only her, and she — she defied me!"

"Was it defiance to marry the man she loved instead of one of your choosing?"

"It was defiance, sir, to marry as she did."

"I deny that it was defiance, or anything else but the noble, womanly act it was."

The colonel ground his teeth fiercely. "To marry the son of the man I hated with my whole soul — God, that she should ask me to forgive her!" he muttered under his breath.

"My father made her supremely happy. What right had you, how dared you attempt to make her the victim of your unjustifiable hate?"

The young voice was stern and unrelenting now, and like the embodiment of an accusing conscience Roger sat with his eyes fixed upon his grandfather's quivering face.

Presently the old man sank back into his chair.

"Ha! she has taught you to despise me, I see," he said, bitterly.

"She never taught me an unworthy thing in all my life," replied Roger, with loyal, boyish indignation. "She —"

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

But all at once he broke off abruptly. Something in his grandfather's face had both startled and silenced him. Colonel Hart was sitting motionless. His head was bowed, and the expression of the distorted features was one to check the impetuous outburst that was rising to the young man's lips, and change his anger to pity. Never in all his life had he looked upon a more despairing countenance. It was a face from which the last gleam of interest in life had fled; and as he gazed, gradually it was borne in upon Roger that he himself was the cause of the sudden change that had so transformed it, and that disappointment, disappointment in him, was piercing the aged heart with anguish. For he had caught the smothered words, uttered as if alone, which his grandfather had spoken as he sat clutching the arms of his chair, "Fool — fool — that I was — to hope —"

Roger crossed the room quickly. He took a chair and drew it up to his grandfather's side, and with one of the shy, swift impulses that made him the lovable being that he was, he reached forth and grasped warmly the long bony fingers of the hand next to him.

"I wish I could make you see just how it all is," he said, very simply and pleadingly. "My mother never spoke a disrespectful word of you to me at any time; even in her saddest, loneliest moments, when I was too young to be much comfort to her, and when

THE INVISIBLE BOND

there was no one else to turn to, she never had any blame for anything you had done. Both she and my father seemed to be able to understand and to pardon."

"I never had aught against your father save that he was his father's son."

The words were spoken dully, as if the time for argument were long, long past.

"But his father had been your most devoted friend," put in Roger, tentatively.

"He ceased to be my friend when he became an enemy to the South."

All at once the fire that had died out of the proud face leaped back into it, and once more the gray eyes flashed defiant.

"But for the action of the Conservative Union men," he said in low, husky tones that echoed like the whisper of a dying gladiator through the room, "but for such men as Roger Bolling, this state would have gone overwhelmingly into the Confederacy. The governor was wholly in sympathy with the Southern cause. After the firing on Fort Sumter, and when the president made proclamation for troops, calling on Kentucky for four regiments for governmental service, what was the response that the governor of Kentucky telegraphed in reply? He said: 'In answer, I say, emphatically, Kentucky will furnish no troops for the wicked purpose of subduing her sister Southern

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

states.' That was the spirit, sir, that animated some of us, and but for the efforts of those, with their chimera of mediatorial neutrality, who opposed Secession, we who fought and bled for the cause we believed in would not have had to steal forth like culprits to join the Southern army. Mediatorial neutrality!" he repeated, scornfully. "And what was to be gained by mediatorial neutrality —"

"Much!"

The word shot from Roger's lips like a stone from a catapult. He had grown suddenly pale, and as he listened to his grandfather's denunciation of the Conservative Union men, the men whom of all others in his state's history he most revered, words sprang unbidden to his lips, and he found himself rushing to their defense, regardless of consequences.

"Much, everything, was gained by it," he said, firmly, but deferentially, "from their point of view. Mediatorial neutrality meant delay, and delay meant a decision, for the Union. Many of the Conservative Union men like my grandfather, were large slave-owners. Their tastes, their ties, their sympathies were Southern through and through. I cannot see but that they were guided by the loftiest principles that ever swayed a body of men, whether one agree or disagree with them. They had not forgotten those words which the Legislature of 1850 ordered

THE INVISIBLE BOND

to be engraved upon the block of Kentucky marble that was to be placed in the monument of General Washington at the nation's capital: 'Under the auspices of heaven and the precepts of Washington, Kentucky will be the last to give up the Union.'"

He spoke quietly, but with feeling, for, as the grandson of one who had suffered much from principle, the subject had always stirred him from his childhood.

Colonel Hart darted a swift glance from under his shaggy brows.

"Let us understand each other," he said, coldly. "You come here seeking a reconciliation of me, and yet you dare to extol to my face the very men who aided in bringing ruin and desolation upon the South."

Roger was silent. The tactlessness of praise which could only enrage was something that he had most unwisely been guilty of. Nothing had been further from his thoughts than that he should have allowed himself to be driven into a discussion of the merits of the men he had just extolled. The old threadbare themes relating to the war between the states, that had so long been supplanted by other and more living issues, had power to move him, it is true, as did everything that concerned the past of his own people, but only as a thing infinitely apart from his own life; while to his grandfather, he realized all at once with a sympathy born of contact, that the period they had

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

so unfortunately touched upon was but as yesterday. The men of that day of storm and stress, whose pulses had fired and whose cheeks had paled with the awful passions of warfare, were the only ones that had reality to him; they that had come afterward were but shadows, the poor weak counterparts of those who had so magnificently preceded them. Never could the breach that had then been made between North and South be healed. The tramp of a great nation marching upward and onward through victory and through defeat, a glad, united people, glorious in harmony and in fraternal feeling, fell upon ears cold and insensible. His proud spirit could break but it could not bend. He could never be reconstructed.

Sorely troubled at his mistake, Roger was seeking about in his mind for something soothing and kindly that he might say, when the old gentleman turned fiercely.

"Let us understand each other," he repeated, a light leaping from his eyes like the flash from steel. "You are my grandson, and you are the grandson of—Roger Bolling." He hesitated an instant and then pronounced the name of the man he so deeply hated and whom he had once so deeply loved in loud, distinct tones. "Make your choice between us," he thundered, "now and forever, for, by the Almighty, I will have no shilly-shallying here!" It was the old pride of

THE INVISIBLE BOND

leadership — a prominent trait with the Kentuckian of a bygone era — which was again asserting itself, impatient of opposition.

Roger met the stern gaze unflinching. The stillness in the room was almost oppressive, and one might have walked from the front doorway to the street before he answered.

"You ask a wholly impossible thing," he said. "One of my grandfathers I never saw. I am seeing the other now practically for the first time. I should like to honor both equally in my thoughts. It is not a question of choice between either."

Though the tone was gentle it was unswerving, and once more Colonel Hart forced the issue.

"It is a question of principle, sir, and I demand an answer. Either Roger Bolling was right and I was wrong, or I was right and he was wrong. You seem to have made some study of the history of your state, and therefore you must know, had you lived in the period I refer to, whether your place would have been with him or with me."

But for the piteous signs of overwrought feeling in the flushed countenance the inquiry would have been almost a ludicrous one.

"But I did not live in that period," began Roger, evasively, thinking of his mother and remorseful of his blunder. "Every age has its own riddles, and all that

COLONEL THEOPHILUS HART

any man has a right to ask of the past is that it teach him to answer his soberly, and with an enlightened conscience."

"But how can it teach him that," roared the colonel, "unless he decide, had he been allowed to participate in its conflicts, where his place would have been? Either you would have been with Roger Bolling, or you would have been with me. If you have not already chosen between us, I command you to make your choice now."

It was a moment of crisis, and Roger knew that there was no escape. He stood up, and with the feverish light still burning in his eyes the old man rose also.

There was a brief waiting, and then the face of the young man paled a little and his voice broke in pity.

"I am sorry that you force my answer," he said. "No man can tell what he would have done in a situation that never was presented to him; but as I see it all to-day, I can only say that I think my place would have been — beside the man you hate."

The colonel wheeled suddenly, but a low, smothered groan broke from him as he crossed the room and touched the electric bell; and again he let fall the words, "Fool — fool!" muttered between clenched teeth.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

“Show this young gentleman to the door,” he gave order to the old negro, who appeared with a most suspicious alacrity the instant the bell was touched. “And see to it,” he added without another glance in the direction of his grandson, “that you do not admit him here again.”

CHAPTER XII

IN THE SHADOW

ROGER went down the steps of his grandfather's house with a heavy heart. The instantaneous anger at the indignity which had been offered him had died out of his face before he had reached the doorway, and only a deep sense of pity and regret remained. But for the surety of rebuff he would have gone back even then to the lonely, bitter old man and sought to soothe and comfort. He blamed himself only for the failure of his visit.

He was beginning to realize as he had never done before in his life the necessity of self-restraint, and he was learning it through the sad lesson of defeat. It was only after many downfalls that the fabled dwarf became a giant; and it was not until long afterward, when sorrow, and loss, and humiliation had done their work with him, that Roger Bolling knew that there had lurked a triumph for him in his every overthrow.

For with his grandfather, as with Marian Day,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

principle, as he understood it, had not swerved — although it was as yet more a thing of instinct with him than of reason; and when driven to the test he had had the manliness to abide by all that his own rashness had brought upon him. He would make no weak whine for himself.

But his heart ached at thought of his mother's disappointment. He dreaded to tell her of the outcome of his visit, not because he feared she would chide, but because he knew that she would be so much more patient with him than he deserved.

He went on up the street for several squares and then turned to the right, walking briskly and looking straight ahead of him, all unmindful of the beauty of the soft September day. Soon he was out in the country.

He had gone a mile or more and his brow had cleared a little when he turned toward the town. But he was in no mood for companionship even yet. Presently he came to where there was a bend in the road, and as he passed an old gateway some one sitting on a moss-covered stone in its shadow looked up and watched him curiously.

He passed on ignorant of observation. His hands were in his pockets, and he was striving by mere quickness of motion to flee the thoughts that pursued him, his long athletic strides making rapid headway.

IN THE SHADOW

But he had gone less than a hundred yards when he was conscious that something more tangible than his own unpleasant reflection was following hard upon him. He heard a short breathing, and as he turned a low laughter broke upon his ears.

Ah, that voice! The peculiar *timbre* of it that had both attracted and repelled him that summer day at the railway station, when he had heard it for the first time, fell with a like effect upon his ears as he waited, dully gazing in the face of the woman he had asked to be his wife.

She was still panting from her run, and her eyes were sparkling.

"It is a most unmaidenly proceeding," she admitted, with a toss of her head, "but I have just made the humiliating discovery that I am not a magnet."

He did not take a step toward her, but a flush swept into his face and then mounted slowly to the temples. The words carried a reproach that stung.

"I willed with all my might that you should see me," she continued, "and — there was every reason why you should; but I might as well have expected a response from the gatepost."

"It was immensely stupid of me," he said, at last, with a heroic effort to look regretful. But his skill was too boyish to match with her fencing. She gave

THE INVISIBLE BOND

him an entirely amiable little sidelong glance from under her large, black-plumed hat, and proposed that they should move on. And as she bent to gather up the skirt of her white lawn gown, he saw that she was laughing not with him but at him.

"I am afraid you are not inclined to make the most of your opportunities," she observed, pointedly, and there had come something mocking into her smile. "For instance, what a beautiful speech you might have made me then!"

"But you know I have had so little practice in making beautiful speeches," he answered, helplessly. Then he added quickly, turning suddenly and facing her with an odd appeal, "You must bear with me; perhaps in time I shall not be such a clumsy stick of a lover as I am to-day."

Ah, then he acknowledged everything! Her bosom heaved.

It was his first reference to the fact that there was anything between them, and a swift gleam shot from under Marian Day's half-closed lashes.

"What might I have said?" he asked, awkwardly.

"There are so many things, each prettier than the other. We might go back and have the same scene over again; and then, after you had passed me by with the lordly air, and I in humble fashion had come running, you might feel inspired to say the thing you should

IN THE SHADOW

have said in explanation of not seeing me. Shall we try it?"

But he did not seem eager to adopt the suggestion, and presently he asked,

"How does it happen you are not at church?"

"I might ask that of you. As for me, I never go to church."

He turned, surprised. "But I saw you in church last Sunday morning, and the Sunday morning before that — in fact every Sunday since you have been here."

"So you did, but it was the force of adverse circumstances. I hate to go to church, and I never go unless there is something —" she caught herself up with a start, for she was about to say, "unless there is something to be gained by it" (the "something" in this particular case having been Roger himself), and supplemented quickly, "something to compel me to do it, as there has been since I came here, in the shape of a determined little hostess who evidently thinks my sins so black as to require special punishment in the way of churchgoing."

"Then how did it happen that she let you off to-day? Have your sins grown whiter?"

She shook her head. "I ran off. She hasn't the remotest idea where I am. I have been out, oh, the longest time."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

She didn't explain that she had been standing at her bedroom window when Roger went down the path toward his own gate, and that from that moment to the present he had not been once completely out of the line of her vision save for the time he had spent in his grandfather's house. That the visit had been a painful one she knew as well as he, for she had been only a few yards from him when he swung out of the yard, and started forth with an harassed, preoccupied look on his face, without so much as a glance around. But even had he seen her then she would not have dared to question him, much as she would have liked to do that. In spite of his boyishness there was a dignity about him that could keep her at arm's length when he wished. He was keeping her there now and she knew it. But she was by no means disturbed. Her appeal was no longer to his passions but to his honor.

"Have I completely horrified you?" she asked, watching him a little narrowly.

He was silent. He could not tell her the bald truth that with him irreligion was a fatal drawback to a woman's attractiveness, even though it were regarded merely in the light of a blemish. But beyond this, the reverence which he in his own heart held for sacred things made it seem a matter of vital moment that there should be unity of feeling between him and the woman who was to be nearest to him on the subject

IN THE SHADOW

which he strove to make of paramount importance in his own life. He was anything but sanctimonious, and there was that in his reserve that made him shy away sensitively from any discussion of the intimate and personal, so that it was only to the very close observer, who was able to look beyond his exuberance, and his usual careless, light-hearted expression, that the realization came of the earnestness and devoutness that really lay at the root of his nature. Marian Day's shrewd, penetrating glances had pierced this outer covering in her first conversation with him. His seriousness had been only too apparent to her; and of all kinds of people the ones she most disliked were those who inclined toward the ethical.

"I see that I have shocked you," she said, with a lazy shrug of the shoulders, "but I can't help being a pagan. Didn't I tell you once I was like that? Do try to remember that I did; it soothes my conscience a little to think that one confession was made to you — not that I have any conscience."

She was studying him intently from under her half-closed eyelids, and she went on quickly:

"Think of the revelations that I may still have in reserve for you! Are you frightened?"

Her breath came hurriedly as she put the question, and her face paled a little. There was something mocking again in the smile that hovered about the

THE INVISIBLE BOND

parted lips. But before he could answer she added with a shade of nervousness in her manner, "Do you realize that this is the first moment we have been alone together since — since our engagement?"

He met her eyes. "I do realize it," he said, gravely, "and I have been thinking of it all the time. I have been wanting to tell you — that is, to explain why it is the first time."

She looked away. It was abominable that she should be thus forced to make a reference where he should have taken the initiative, and she bit her lips with vexation. But when she turned to him an instant afterward there was only an expression of wistful inquiry on the beautiful face. She was not too alluring. She was far too clever to make a misuse of her power; and though she well knew that for the moment passion had spent its force with him, and that he was cold to her, she was a woman that knew how to bide her time, for she doubted not that her hour would yet come.

"I have been greatly troubled," he began, presently. "My mother is seriously ill, and I have been constantly with her. I went at once — the next day, you remember, to see you, but you were not alone, and —"

He caught himself, revolting against the tone of apology he had unconsciously fallen into, just as if she had been finding fault with him for his neglect of her. The color swept into his face.

IN THE SHADOW

"Oh," he cried, impulsively, "I don't know how to make you understand what the last three or four days have been to me. It has been a terrible shock to me to know of my mother's condition. I am not able, even yet, to face the hard fact. I cannot think of anything else. You and I will have a lifetime in which to think of each other, now —" his voice broke and he waited a moment before he could go on — "now, forgive me, but my first thought must be for her."

"I know," she replied, softly; "I understand."

They walked on some distance in silence.

"Thank you," he said, at length, low under his breath, and as if she had just spoken, "thank you."

They had reached the town, and just before they turned into the street on which the Bollings and Caldwells lived, she gave a swift glance at him. She had been wondering whether he had seen the notice in the morning paper, and had concluded finally that he had not. On the whole she rather regretted it. In the realization that she would have to deal with a higher order of gentleman than she had chanced thus far to know anything of, there was a dual feeling — one decidedly uncomfortable, based upon a fundamental element of her own character that rendered her ill at ease in the presence of his refinement, the

THE INVISIBLE BOND

other jubilant because of the surety that his honor gave.

"Have you — have you told her?" she faltered, conscious that her knees were trembling under her as she put the question.

He did not meet her eyes, but his tone was firm and distinctly final.

"I have not told her."

"You think it would be unwise?"

"I am sure that it would be unwise."

A spasm of fear shot through her. He had seen the notice! Possibly he even suspected —

"I am so glad that you haven't told her," she said.

"I had been hoping that you would not. I haven't even told Mrs. Caldwell. Let us keep it as just our very own until — until Mrs. Bolling is well again."

But Roger had scarcely heard the words she uttered. They had reached the Caldwell home, and as he looked in the direction of his own, which was only a short distance beyond, being separated from it by a narrow street that ran between, his eye had been caught by a familiar vehicle drawn up beside the curbing. The carriage was Dr. Beverley's, and at sight of it his heart stood still.

She saw the sudden blanching of his face and the involuntary quickening of his footsteps, but she made

IN THE SHADOW

no comment. She knew far better than he his mother's condition, but it seemed to her best to appear ignorant of it.

At the doorway she dismissed him quickly.

Roger ran rather than walked the distance that separated the two houses. The black foreboding which all morning had been upon him seemed to find justification in the doctor's unexpected presence. He knew that, unless especially sent for, the hour for the usual visit was not until much later in the day. Something unforeseen must have happened in his absence. Or had there been a subterfuge in the note she had sent him — the old, maternal solicitude for him that from the first had sought to conceal her illness from him? Why had he been sent away on his bootless errand to his grandfather on that day? Why had he not suspected? Why, if she had grown worse, had he not been told that Dr. Beverley was to be summoned? Why —

Mrs. Caldwell met him at the door and with one look into her face he knew all.

He stood perfectly still, speechless, transfixed, his features like granite. Then, as if suddenly electrified by the thought that pierced him, he sped past her and made a dash for the stairway.

She was by his side in an instant, tears streaming down her cheeks.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Wait — wait — oh, Roger, dear, just a moment while I tell you!" she said in an excited whisper, as she clung to him.

He paused with his hand on the balustrade. He looked at her strangely.

"You have nothing to tell me," he answered, dully; "I know."

"But there may be — there may be a little gleam of hope. Wait until you have seen Dr. Beverley. He has only spoken to me once. It is penumonia. Just a little while after you went away the servants became frightened and came for me. I telephoned immediately for Dr. Beverley and to the hospital for a nurse. They both came at once, and have been with her ever since. There is to be a consultation of physicians at three."

There was genuine grief and kindness in the little woman's quivering voice, but Roger could bear no more.

He went quickly and softly up the stairs. Just as he reached the landing a door was opened — his mother's door. Dr. Beverley came out, his eyes blinking a little behind their gold-rimmed spectacles.

At sight of the tall figure standing a few feet away from him, the doctor paused. There was an intense silence for an instant, and then, with an infinite tenderness, Dr. Beverley came forward and grasped the young man's hand.

"God help you, my boy," he said, fervently.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BAPTISM OF SORROW

MRS. BOLLING lingered five days and died on the dawning of the sixth. She had had few entirely lucid moments, and to Roger, who sat with almost superhuman endurance beside her day and night, his eyes fixed hungrily upon her face, longing in his utter hopelessness that there might be one last word before the veil should fall between them, there had only come a mute pressure of the hand, or a glance of unspeakable tenderness to tell him that his mother's heart ached with pity for the desolation she must make.

Roger's father had died in Virginia and had been buried there in the old town of Williamsburg, where, beneath ancient moss-covered tombstones and dim armorial bearings, many of his forefathers slept; and it had been always his mother's wish that her grave should be beside her husband's. There was a service at the church with which she had long been connected, and hundreds had flocked to it to pay their last mournful tribute to the sweet and gracious

THE INVISIBLE BOND

gentlewoman whose passing left a gap that would not soon be filled.

After the service the funeral train wound slowly through the heart of the town to the station. Dr. Beverley sat beside Roger during that slow, stately drive, as silent as he, and with a heart bursting with sympathetic feeling. And then as the long line of carriages drew up beside the railway platform, foreseeing the further strain and forestalling it, he drew the young man away from the crowd of near relatives and friends that, with mistaken kindness, would have sought to gather round him, whisked him off to a shadowy corner, and placed his portly form in front like a bulwark.

Mrs. Caldwell was in the carriage with Marian Day. The little woman had cried until her face was red and swollen, and she was quivering from her head to her feet in an intensity of nervousness.

Marian turned and looked at her calmly.

"Are you cold?" she asked. "Your teeth are chattering."

Mrs. Caldwell raised her head from her handkerchief for an instant.

"Cold?" she echoed, vaguely, "I don't know whether I am cold or not, I am just — so — so unhappy. Oh, poor Roger!"

"I don't see that you are helping him any by crying

THE BAPTISM OF SORROW

like that, and you will certainly make yourself ill. Here we are, I believe."

The carriage had stopped, and Mrs. Caldwell pulled up the blind and looked about her. "Where is Tim?" she whispered, breathlessly — "if I could see Tim for a moment!"

"But you can't. He is one of the pall-bearers. Surely you are not going to get out?"

"I must see Tim. Oh —"

She drew back, having caught her husband's eye. Tim Caldwell appeared for a second at the carriage door, his big blonde face grave and troubled.

"Oh, Tim," she sobbed, "I want you to go with Roger. I don't care what he says about not wanting anybody with him. Think how his mother would have felt about his taking that terrible journey alone! And you know he hasn't got anybody to look after him now but just you and me, and —"

"Roger doesn't want me, Ada, and we must let him have his own way about everything, you know. Sit back, little woman; it is beginning to rain." And the tall figure disappeared in the crowd.

Five minutes passed. Then there came the sound of the tramp of many footsteps hurrying down the platform, the clanging of a bell, and then that slow, heavy reverberation of a long train of cars moving out of a station.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Mrs. Caldwell sank back with a gasp. She had grown very pale.

"Oh, isn't it pitiful — pitiful!" she whispered, opening her eyes very wide and looking at Marian in a kind of awe, like a frightened child.

But Marian was drawing on her jacket and appeared absorbed in the process.

She leaned back and looked absently out of the window. She did not speak for some time, and when she did there was a cold ring in her voice like the echo of metal that has been loudly struck.

"Yes, it is pitiful," she said. "But he will get over it. He is not the first man to lose his mother."

Roger did not return for more than a week. There was an old bachelor brother of his father's living at Williamsburg, and he remained with him, finding the first days of his bereavement more bearable in surroundings unassociated with his mother's presence. Then, under the ceaseless ache in his heart, he grew restless, and there came over him a great longing to be back again in the spot where every object would be a reminder of her, acute as he knew his anguish would be.

Mrs. Caldwell and Marian Day had just finished luncheon when his telegram was brought in. It was addressed to Mrs. Caldwell, and it asked that she have

THE BAPTISM OF SORROW

his house opened for him, mentioning the hour when he should arrive.

She glanced up at the clock. "Half past two!" she exclaimed, "and Roger is to be here at twenty minutes after five!"

Marian's face did not change a muscle, but Tim Caldwell's broad, good-natured countenance was instantly troubled. A moment before he had been laughing heartily at his own facetiousness (compelling from Marian, as usual, a most reluctant attention) but as the message was read aloud to him his big blue eyes filled suddenly. To hide his emotion he leaned forward and laboriously selected a peach from the platter in the center of the table, leaving it, however, untasted when he rose.

"I shall have to get James and the other servants together, and I must hurry because there is not very much time," said Mrs. Caldwell, breathless, and with a little catch in her voice, as she glanced again beseechingly at the clock.

"Will you let me help you?" asked Marian, turning and facing her. She had walked to the window and had been looking out on the soggy sward across which a light wind was blowing a flutter of dank, yellow leaves.

"No — oh, no," replied Mrs. Caldwell, quickly, "that is — it is good of you to offer, my dear — I

THE INVISIBLE BOND

shan't need you. I don't think — " she hesitated, and then hurried on — "that Roger would care to have any one touch his mother's things except some one who loved her dearly."

"Perhaps not," responded Marian, very quietly. She yawned a little and reached for her book which she had dropped beneath the table when they first sat down. Then she left the room.

Tim Caldwell's eyes followed her. "Don't you think you were just a little bit rude to her, dear?" he asked, anxiously.

"Rude?" Mrs. Caldwell was making a mental summary of the things she had to do and do speedily, silently marking them off on her fingers. "Tim, what on earth do you mean?"

She looked up innocently, her pretty lisp falling as ever like sweetest music on her husband's ears. He crossed the room to her side and put his arms about her.

"Never mind," he said. He stood stroking the small brown head nestled like a bird's against his shoulder, and presently he added, softly, "Poor Roger! How I wish there were some sweet little woman for him to come back to! Did it ever occur to you, Ada, that he has rather a fancy for Miss Day?"

"But she is not a sweet little woman — she is fully five feet nine," she replied, evasively, but positively.

THE BAPTISM OF SORROW

Her husband's eyes twinkled. "But you know every woman who is charming is always a sweet little woman to me. I shouldn't know how to describe them in any other way. Force of habit, I suppose. I may be wrong," he added, meditatively, "but I'm inclined to believe there is something, I don't know just what, between those two."

"No — no!"

The reply broke from Mrs. Caldwell's lips like a cry of alarm, and he met her startled gaze with a look of dumb surprise. His mouth opened as if to speak, but he could find no words to convey his astonishment at the protest her words involuntarily expressed. His under jaw fell.

"Why, I thought — I thought you liked her," he stammered at length.

"Like her? Of course I like her." Mrs. Caldwell's tone was hurried and even a trifle petulant. "Everybody likes her — she is so clever and so beautiful, but —"

"But what?" Tim Caldwell demanded, stolidly. He was going to get at the root of this if it should take him until dark. Under all his slow amiability there was an obstinacy that could not be lightly put off. "But what?" he repeated, with his eyes on his wife's face.

She avoided his glance. "She and Roger would not

THE INVISIBLE BOND

be at all suited to each other; and then, you know Mrs. Bolling would not have liked it."

"Why?"

"Oh, I am sure she would not. She always admired Sibyl Fontaine."

He stood leaning one arm on the mantel, tapping it thoughtfully with the forefinger of his big right hand. What a queer combination a woman was anyway! He proposed to try the effect of a bombshell.

"Ada, there *is* something between them," he said, solemnly, "and I happen to know it."

She grew white and tremulous. "Oh, Tim, do you really know anything?" she cried, coming back to him and grasping his arm tightly. "Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure!" he declared, unblushingly.

"Oh, but it would be just — terrible!" she exclaimed under her breath. "And I thought — I thought she didn't care an earthly thing about him."

"What made you think that?" he was stroking her hair again, much to her discomfiture, as she had arranged it with especial care, having tried for the first time a new method of coiffure with her most unsatisfactory locks.

"What made me think that? Oh, so many things. I really don't believe he is the kind of man she likes in the least, in fact she almost told me he was not. Marian is always very confidential with me."

THE BAPTISM OF SORROW

"Humph!" he remarked, dryly. "I should say that she was the kind of woman that keeps her own counsels, myself. Why do you think she doesn't care for him? I should have picked out Roger as a fellow to cut a pretty wide swath with the feminine contingent."

"Oh, he does — he truly does; all the girls are wild about him, and Judith Beverley is positively pathetic."

"So it is only Miss Day who is disdainful, you think? Poor Ada, how you have been deceived!" he observed, with exaggerated sympathy.

"She doesn't care for him!" The little woman stamped her foot angrily.

"Give me an instance to prove it," he demanded, imperturbably.

"Tim, she never shed a tear at the funeral."

All at once she looked up in his face and caught the humorous gleam in his mild blue eyes. She pushed him from her.

"You are laughing!" she exclaimed, "and I don't believe you know a thing."

"I know there is something between them," he insisted, his mouth twitching behind his blonde moustache.

"Then in Heaven's name say what it is, and don't keep me standing here all afternoon."

"I will," he said, obligingly, and with a broad smile. He took out his watch and examined it critically.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

“Do you want me to tell you precisely what is between them?” he inquired, presently. “That train is very apt to be late, but the nearest calculation I can make is that there is at the present moment between them something like three good hours of car travel, and —”

But he was spared the trouble of enumerating the number of miles, for Mrs. Caldwell had made a hasty exit.

She went at once about Roger's affairs, only delaying long enough to despatch her servants upon numerous errands relating to the immediate opening of his darkened home. It would be a long time, she feared, before the wheels of his *ménage* should run smoothly again, and she pitied him with all her heart, her practical mind disturbed not only for his spiritual loneliness but for his bodily discomfort.

By half-past five everything was in readiness, and a cheerful fire blazed in the little drawing-room, for the afternoon had grown chilly after the rain. Mrs. Caldwell gave a last look around and then went softly from the house.

“I can't — I just can't accustom myself to the idea that she is not somewhere near and at any moment may come walking in,” she said to Marian Day, with trembling lips, a few moments afterwards.

Marian put down her novel. She was already dressed for dinner, and she was sitting in the library

THE BAPTISM OF SORROW

in a large leathern chair, her slippered feet daintily out-stretched to the glow of heaped-up hickory logs. She looked the personification of luxurious contentment. Her black net gown, though old and shabby, having been her standby for years on all important occasions when evening clothes were demanded, fitted her superbly, and there was about her an air of indolent grace that harmonized with her surroundings.

"Are you very tired?" Marian asked, presently, her lips parting in the slow, intimate smile she was wont to bestow upon her friend, whose guilelessness never suspected the hint of cynicism that lurked behind the flash of the girl's white teeth.

Mrs. Caldwell looked up. "Tired? I don't know — perhaps I am a little tired; not that there was anything really for me to do. She had trained her servants beautifully, and they knew how to take hold at once. She really was wonderful, my dear, and do you know, I actually don't believe she ever saw the inside of her kitchen in her life? She was just the opposite of Mrs. Beverley and myself, who are always fussing around with a receipt book in our hands."

Suddenly she paused, her eyes on Marian's bare white throat and gleaming arms. "Why the black net?" she asked, abruptly. "Are you going out?"

Marian laughed, but looked away a trifle nervously. "Don't remind of me my poverty!" she exclaimed.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"It was positively a last resort; everything else is in rags." Then she added, quickly, "There was a telephone message for you from Mr. Caldwell. He thanks you for sending the carriage, and says he will go to meet Mr. Bolling at the proper time. The train is delayed. There was a wreck up the road."

"A wreck!" Mrs. Caldwell started up. "Did he say whether any one was hurt or not?"

Marian's face was amiably supercilious. She reached out her hand and laid it patronizingly on her friend's arm. "Hold on," she said. "Don't let itself get agitated. I believe he did say that two persons were killed, the engineer and the brakeman. Were they special friends of yours?"

"No, but Roger is a very dear friend, indeed, and you startled me. What a cool little way you have! I wonder," Mrs. Caldwell crossed the room and stood looking out the window upon the gathering twilight, "I wonder, if you really cared for a person, if you could be quite so collected? For instance, if Roger were — were your lover, and you heard that his train was wrecked —"

But Marian interrupted. She rose and came swiftly toward the window.

"How dark it has grown!" she cried, as if realizing suddenly that night was about to descend.

Mrs. Caldwell tapped absently on the window-pane.

THE BAPTISM OF SORROW

"His train was due at twenty minutes after five," she said, presently, "and I gave them fifteen minutes, which was really more than was necessary, and now it is," she glanced toward the clock —

"After six," put in Marian, promptly.

"Horrors! Is it really?" shrieked Mrs. Caldwell. "Then I must go and dress immediately. "I can't but hope that Tim will persuade Roger to come here to dinner with us, although I ordered a lovely dinner for him in his own home. You never can tell how people in sorrow are going to act. Now Tim —"

All at once she broke off, her eyes falling on a bowl of flowers on the table.

"Oh, I forgot!" she said, "I completely forgot! I meant to take those flowers."

Marian had gone back to her chair before the fire. She rose.

"Let me take them," she suggested, quietly.

"Would you?" Mrs. Caldwell hesitated. "I could send one of the servants, of course, but I should not be sure that they were put just where I want them — on that little mahogany table of hers down-stairs that she always sat by. Would you honestly not mind?"

"Not in the least."

"But suppose they should come in on you — Tim and Roger? It would be awkward."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"There is no danger. They will not be here for fully half an hour yet."

"Then don't forget, my dear, on the little ta —"

"I understand."

The door closed. Marian stood a moment beside the bowl of flowers, tenderly stroking the delicate pink petals of the loose bunch of roses. There was a sparkle in her eyes; her lips were parted and she was smiling softly to herself. All at once she bent her lips to the flowers. "Thank you," she said, "thank you." She turned and again went back to her chair, and sat gazing into the fire. It was not until the hands of the clock pointed to a quarter of seven that she rose, and throwing a light scarf about her, gathered up the bowl of flowers and left the house.

It had grown quite dark. As she went up the steps, a voice within sounded as it drew near the doorway — a man's voice speaking kindly, soothing words. She moved quickly back into the shadow of the porch where the vines were thickest, and stood waiting. The wind kept up a dismal whispering as it swept past the corner of the house, and with one hand she grasped the scarf about her throat lest it be blown away, while with the other she guarded the bowl of flowers, which she was holding in the crook of her arm pressed close against her chest.

THE BAPTISM OF SORROW

Presently the door opened, and Tim Caldwell went down the steps. After the last sound of his footsteps had died away she crept out from her hiding-place, and stood gazing in at the window. Roger had neglected to draw the blinds, and the warm room, serene and comfortable, for an instant caught and held her attention. Then her eyes rested upon the central figure.

He had drawn an armchair — his mother's chair — up before the fire, and he was sitting in it, his face buried in his hands, and his whole being bowed as if a blight had fallen on it. Not a muscle stirred. She could hear the crackling of the fire on the hearth; she could almost hear him breathe. Several moments passed. Still he sat motionless. One could readily imagine that the young form, so pathetic in its grief and isolation, was benumbed, paralyzed beneath its weight of sorrow.

She was not easily appealed to, yet the spectacle touched her, and there was an unwonted gentleness on her face as she noiselessly turned the knob, pushed open the front door and entered.

She walked softly across the hall, and stood an instant on the threshold of the little room which she had entered for the first time two months before. Still he did not stir.

She had thrown off her scarf, and the firelight

THE INVISIBLE BOND

gleamed delicately on her white throat and smooth, round arms, bare below the elbow. She waited a moment.

Her breath was coming quickly now, and her lips parted, as they were apt to do whenever she was under the stress of an excitement. Her face had grown suddenly colorless, but it was tender and beautiful, like a pearl. Her eyes shone, as if lighted by an almost unearthly flame.

She crossed the room swiftly, stealthily. She put down the bowl of flowers, and then, still watching him, and with throbbing pulses, she sank down upon her knees beside him.

He started. Her unexpected presence had roused him from his lethargy, but it had also dazed and astounded him. He could not speak. He could not even rise. So little had she been in his thoughts it was as if a stranger were kneeling there beside him. He sat mutely staring down upon her, too vaguely conscious of the relation she bore to him to find words with which to speak to her.

The room was red in the glow of the firelight; and there was no sound save the crackling of the logs on the hearth and the sad whisperings of the wind among the vines that grew about the porch and near the windows on the far side of the house. For a while she bowed her head, silent, half timid in her expression of

THE BAPTISM OF SORROW

humble sympathy — as if not only her lovely form but her whole being were prostrate at his feet. If it was acting it was well done. But suddenly her face was uplifted. She pressed nearer to him, and she had grown white as alabaster. The soft pearly tints had vanished, and there was a wild questioning in her eyes. He met her gaze uncertainly. For an instant his heart stood still. Then he understood. His haggard face went pale.

He did not speak, but gradually there came a change in him, just as if the long strain were being slowly lifted, and he was sinking down upon the first pillow that was offered to him, too exhausted to inquire whose hand it was that had smoothed it for him. She had chosen an opportune moment. In his desolation and need of the womanly he turned to her. With unutterable weariness he bent down his head, and she softly smiled.

All at once he reached out his arms to her and drew her to him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SHADOW OF THE SECRET

It was one month later, and near the close of one of those cool, brilliant October days that to the Kentuckian is atonement complete and satisfying for a climate that on occasions can show a variableness that only the most fickle of womankind could equal. Marian Day had just returned from a long walk, and her face glowed like a tea rose beneath her big black hat. She was in excellent health and spirits, and though disposed still to cavil a little with fate for its withholdings, on the whole she was resigned, having gradually drifted into that quiescent, comfortable state of mind that is the consolation of the morally obtuse in the midst of compromise. She had asked large things of life, according to her vision, and the most she could look forward to was freedom from the bald ugliness of her previous existence. No brilliancy, no excitement, none of that tingling of the blood that follows in the wake of power and as a result of the sort of daring *coup* she had always longed for, was to be hers. It was to be barely

THE SHADOW OF THE SECRET

an escape — if really an escape at all. That she well knew. Yet she proposed to make the most of her changed conditions.

She had extended her visit from week to week, having found the hospitality of the Caldwells limitless; but she had been a good deal put to, after the diphtheria pretext could no longer be resorted to, to find plausible explanation to give her friends why her presence at the country school was not demanded. She had said nothing to either of them of her engagement.

But Roger had suddenly brought things to a climax. She had just left him, and he had asked that they be married at once — in fact in a week from that very day. He had also insisted that she inform the Caldwells immediately.

As she ran up the stairs and tapped lightly on Mrs. Caldwell's door, a sudden misgiving that had overtaken her many times of late blanched her face. What if, after all, the little woman were to be reckoned with? Could it be possible that she had miscalculated? The thought filled her with distinct alarm. She was instantly, fiercely resentful even in prospect.

"Come in," said a sleepy voice within, and Marian turned the knob and entered. Her pulses were bounding riotously, but her manner was nonchalant.

Mrs. Caldwell was lying curled up on a couch before the fire, her plump form enveloped in a pale blue

THE INVISIBLE BOND

kimono. "Isn't it ridiculously cold for this time of the year?" she said, as she motioned Marian to a chair. "But then you know away back there in September we had fires. Don't you remember? — the night Roger came home —"

"I remember," interrupted Marian, with her eyes on the hearth. She had loosened the cheap piece of black fur she wore about her throat, and with the marvelous adaptability she possessed, that made her at home at once in any surroundings, she was leaning back in her chair languidly, and as composedly as if she had been there all the afternoon. One would never have suspected that an important communication was quivering on her lips, or that five minutes before she had been walking rapidly in the keen autumn air. The faint color that the wind had brought into her cheeks had vanished. She was very white and very still.

"It is cold," she responded, lightly, "but I like it, don't you?" She was formulating in her mind the wording of her announcement and she appeared a little inattentive, as she rested her head against the back of her chair.

Mrs. Caldwell supposed that the warmth of the room had made her drowsy. "Like it?" she exclaimed, in her airy, animated way, "I delight in it, of course, after all that melting weather we had. But I am surprised that you do."

THE SHADOW OF THE SECRET

Marian turned her face slowly. "Why?" she asked.

"Because you belong to the tropics — you look like that, I mean. And if you really did live in the tropics and were an animal instead of a human being, do you know what sort of animal you would be?"

Marian shook her head.

"I suppose I oughtn't to do it," continued Mrs. Caldwell, "but I am always seeing likenesses between people and animals. Tim often reminds me of a big Newfoundland dog."

"No doubt he would be highly flattered if he knew."

Mrs. Caldwell broke into one of her spasmodic little screams. "Oh, he knows," she cried, "I always tell him everything."

Marian looked up quickly. But she only said, "What is the particular bird or beast or reptile you would liken me to?"

"You are sure you won't be offended?" inquired Mrs. Caldwell, quite serious.

"Not at all," replied Marian, imperturbably, and with a swift, flashing smile.

"But I once told a man he reminded me of a rhinoceros," responded Mrs. Caldwell in an injured tone, "and he never forgave me. The truth was he was just 'de ve'y spit o' one,' as my old nurse used to say."

"I shall be more placable. Tell me. What?"

"A tigress, my dear, and your abode is the jungle."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Marian stirred slightly and laughed, her lips curling with their faint hint of derision. There were times when Mrs. Caldwell impressed her as being strangely crude.

"Every woman who can feel is a tigress at heart," she observed, "the rest are only tame cats."

She had taken off her hat, and she sat smoothing the worn ostrich tips about the brim absently with her fingers. Presently she looked her friend directly in the eyes.

"I have something to say to you," she said, "and I have been wondering how I would best say it."

"Say it any way you please, my dear," replied Mrs. Caldwell, without suspicion, "but don't keep me waiting too long, my curiosity cannot stand much strain."

Marian hesitated a moment. Her heart was fluttering wildly again, and she had suddenly paled. But her voice was controlled and clear as a bell.

"Then, without tiresome paraphrase," she said, "let me tell you that I am going to be married to Mr. Roger Bolling next Wednesday morning at ten o'clock."

Mrs. Caldwell sprang to her feet. She gave a faint little gasp, and then stood perfectly still, wildly clasping her hands at her breast.

"Won't you sit down?" inquired Marian, coolly, and in the *sauve* tone of a hostess addressing her

THE SHADOW OF THE SECRET

guest. She was perfectly at her ease, but watchful and not too bold.

The little woman obeyed like an automaton. She sank back on the couch, her eyes still fixed imploringly on the girl's face, dumb, and utterly helpless; and Marian, watching her furtively from under her half-closed eyelids, was conscious of a fierce thrill of exultation. The comparison, if commonplace, had been apt; and at the bare thought of opposition there were aroused in her emotions which made her tremble. But she was almost reassured, though not a word had yet been spoken. A smile leaped across her face and was gone like a flash of lightning. She stretched out her hands to the fire.

"Won't you congratulate me?" she said, "or are you holding all your felicitations in reserve — for Roger?"

"Then it is true, really true?" Mrs. Caldwell's voice was so low that it was barely audible.

Marian leaned back and laughed softly. "It is perfectly true," she replied, growing all at once grave again. "Do you actually mean to say that you never suspected it?"

Mrs. Caldwell was silent. She sat gazing for a long time into the fire, and twisting her rings nervously. Her piquant features were thoughtful and deeply troubled. Even her lightness had been suddenly

THE INVISIBLE BOND

sobered, and she knew in no vague and uncertain fashion that she had come face to face with something that was making a solemn demand upon her which she could not ignore. Her first impulse was to shift the responsibility. If only she might talk it over with Tim!

She rose and crossed the room quickly. She stood a moment at the window, absently fingering the curtains, and looking out into the street. Lights were already gleaming from the houses opposite. It was growing late, and at any moment she was likely to hear her husband's ponderous step ascending the stairs. Plainly she must have it over quickly, if ever, for she dared not allow time to tamper with her resolution.

"Marian," she said, turning slowly, and forcing the words with difficulty from her trembling lips, "have you — have you told him?"

Marian faced her coldly. "Told him?" she inquired, vaguely. "I have told him a great many things. What particular thing do you mean?"

"There is only one thing that really makes any difference — so far as the past is concerned."

"I imagine it is the future that is occupying his thoughts just now, not the past. I am a rather expensive luxury for him."

She had sunk far back into the shadow, and her attitude was one of insolent ease and defiance.

THE SHADOW OF THE SECRET

Mrs. Caldwell met the cool gaze leveled upon her with a visible shrinking. She came hesitatingly back to the fire, and sat down on the couch, taking a nearer seat. All at once she reached forth both her hands and clasped the arm of the great chair in which Marian was sitting.

"Oh," she cried, with a little catch in her voice, "if you haven't yet told him, let me beseech you to do it without delay. No woman could be happy in her marriage, knowing that a thing like that was forever between her and her husband. When I was married I simply ransacked my brain to find something to tell Tim. There really wasn't anything, but it made me feel much better to know that everything was perfectly transparent between us. Roger is the sort of man that would expect absolute frankness, just as he would be big enough to be always perfectly sincere himself. There are a great many things that he might condone, but deception is not among them."

"Deception?" Marian raised her eyebrows and stared. "May I ask you to tell me what you mean?"

The tone was as distant as if addressed to a stranger who had dared to take an unwarrantable liberty.

Mrs. Caldwell stiffened a little. "This is not very pleasant," she said, "for either of us, but you must know to what I refer."

"I assure you I haven't the remotest idea."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

“Oh, surely —” Mrs. Caldwell’s eyes were wide and wondering — “surely you haven’t forgotten the letter — that terrible letter that came last summer? Oh, why do you make me remind you of it?”

Marian rose. “It is in the grossest bad taste imaginable that you should remind me of it,” she said, severely, leaning one arm against the mantel, and parrying the look with an expression of quiet disdain.

“But, Marian, dear,” cried Mrs. Caldwell, in confusion, and beginning again to weaken under the spell of the woman’s tremendous sweep of will that was rapidly reducing her to the mental condition of a befuddled child, “can’t you see that Roger ought to be told? And you must appreciate my position in the matter. You know that I love you dearly, and it just breaks my heart to think of all that you have suffered. But I owe an obligation to Roger too — to Roger and to his dead mother. If she had lived, and if some day the discovery had come to her that I was a sharer in this secret, what would she have thought of me if I had stood by and kept silence? Oh, if you can’t bring yourself to speak of it to him, let me tell him, I will try to do it delicately, I —”

With an inconceivably swift movement Marian Day turned and sank into her chair, grasping the hands of the suddenly terrified being before her. “Would you

THE SHADOW OF THE SECRET

dare," she cried, "would you actually dare to do that thing?"

"But Marian —"

Mrs. Caldwell glanced helplessly into the burning eyes peering into her own, and drew back in a sort of desperation. "Oh, you know, you know I only want to do what is right," she moaned.

"Right!"

The single word broke from Marian's lips like the tortured cry of the mortally wounded, as with a gesture of infinite scorn she sprang to her feet again, and stood with flashing eyes and quivering nostrils — at bay, yet ready to battle till the last drop of blood be shed in her own defense.

"Right!" she repeated, with a slow measurement of words that cut like sword thrusts dealt by a well-disciplined fencer. "And what is right, may I ask? — since you have taken upon your lips the word that has wrought more woe than any other, including even death itself. Is it right, in order to satisfy a sheer quibble of conscience, that you should reveal what the merest accident made you acquainted with, and what you gave your most sacred word never to disclose? Is it right that you should blast my life?"

"Oh, Marian — Marian — that you should speak to me like that!"

But Marian was unrelenting now. She had grown

THE INVISIBLE BOND

deadly pale, but once more she was absolutely calm. She went back to her chair.

"Let us talk this matter over quietly," she said. "I realize that I am in your power; you can destroy me if you will. But the question is, would it be right to destroy me, just because you can? The word is yours; then try the case by your own standard, the standard of right."

It was with Goliath's own sword that his head was severed; and Mrs. Caldwell, finding her weapon thus snatched from her, sank back weak and distracted, unable to speak a word.

"You say that you owe a duty to Roger Bolling and to his dead mother; do you owe none to me?" asked Marian, coldly.

"Oh, you poor, dear girl, do you think I don't recognize that," sobbed Mrs. Caldwell, floundering wildly in the sea of doubt into which Marian's strong hand had thrust her. "If only you could know how my heart aches for you, you wouldn't — wouldn't — accuse me of being anything that isn't kind."

"And yet —"

All at once Marian wheeled and looked intently into the tear-stained face before her. For some time she did not speak, and when she did, her features expressed a strange transformation. She had been thinking hard.

THE SHADOW OF THE SECRET

"I have only one thing to ask," she said, "since you feel that you must tell him —"

Her voice was sweet and plaintive, and she bowed her head as in acceptance of her friend's decree. "There is just one thing. I do not want to be here when he is told. I shall never see his face again, and I want you to promise me that you will wait until I have gone before you tell him — tell him — of what you have saved him from."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Caldwell, wildly, "you don't mean — you don't mean that, even if he should —"

"I mean that I should not be willing to marry him, even though he should still be willing to marry me, as you suggest — after he has been told."

Mrs. Caldwell flung out her arms desperately.

"Oh, I wish, I wish I knew what I ought to do!" she cried.

"It is very simple," said Marian, quietly, with her eyes on the fire. "It is only to keep your word."

Mrs. Caldwell started. "I did not mean to break it," she replied, with quiet dignity. "Everything I have said has been based upon the presumption that you would release me."

Marian sat gazing thoughtfully into the writhing lilac flames. She knew that she had only to say, "Then I do not release you," to end the matter at once,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

definitely and finally, thus taking the whole burden upon herself, and, in a measure, relieving Mrs. Caldwell of the painful and unaccustomed weight that conscience had laid upon her plump shoulders. But there was another and surer way. It implied some risk. But hers was one of those daring natures that find a certain exhilaration in hazard, and she would have been capable of staking everything upon the throw of a single die, even though the game had already just been magnificently won. It had not been really won in this instance, in spite of the fact that Mrs. Caldwell had wavered like a weathercock at the first breath of disapproval. There was, in truth, only one method whereby she might with any degree of surety be depended on, and that was to make her a coadjutor, through an appeal to her never-failing kindness of heart. *

Presently Marian looked up. She gave a slow glance about the pretty bedroom. It was all in blue, and it was soft and cozy as a bird's-nest. For an instant there flashed before her mind's eye a vision of the hideous spot she had left at the close of the last school term, its cheerlessness and utter crudity heightened by contrast with the warmth and luxury about her. But she was not deterred. Her voice, though very low, was distinct and steady when she spoke at last, and there was in her manner a sweet and patient renunciation that was without hint of anger.

THE SHADOW OF THE SECRET

"I release you absolutely."

As the words fell from her lips there came a strange dizziness in her head. For a moment the room swam before her. What was the meaning of the expression she saw in the eyes bent so fixedly upon her? Was it relief, or was it compassion? She could not tell. She went on quickly,

"You know something of what I have suffered — a little. But I could never make you half understand, even if I should try. I haven't tried. It always seems so useless to expect a person who has never known despair to comprehend the anguish of the despairing. But you do know that both literally and figuratively I have been starved. This is the first door that has ever opened to me. It was through you that it was opened, and it shall be through you that it is closed — if it is to be closed. I have been hard and bitter and rebellious, and it only seems natural to go back to the old way of thinking and feeling. But I had almost given over seeing myself as a person branded and manacled. I had begun to look forward to the future — actually to believe that there was a future for me. As the wife of Roger Bolling I beheld myself rapidly developing into the typical Kentucky married woman. You are all so good. Do you wonder that I wished to emulate you?"

There was a faint trace of sarcasm in the words,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

but Mrs. Caldwell did not perceive it. For an instant her attention had been diverted — by the opening of the front hall door and the sound of a beloved footstep making music in her ears. Her expression grew soft and tremulous, and two great tears welled up into her eyes. For once fate, as Marian would have called it, had dealt a kindly turn.

Quickly perceiving her advantage Marian rose. The heavy steps had begun to ascend the stairs, and she was breathing rapidly now, unable to conceal the agitation that had swept over her. It was necessary to speak with the utmost haste.

“I leave the decision with you,” she whispered. “Let us have in any case no harking backward. I have just ten dollars in the world, and I have resigned my position at the school. I want you to know everything. The responsibility rests with you. I am at your mercy. Shall you tell him, or shall you be silent?”

Mrs. Caldwell had also risen. She was quivering in every nerve, but her face revealed at last only a single all-absorbing emotion — the emotion of overwhelming pity. She put up both her tiny hands. Her husband’s steps were almost at the doorway. All at once she stumbled forward, for tears were blinding her eyes.

“I shall be silent,” she said.

CHAPTER XV

FOR HIS OATH'S SAKE

It was Roger's wedding-day, and it had dawned so dark, and chill, and cheerless that only the eye of faith could be persuaded that the sun still shone somewhere behind the sullen expanse of cloudland overhead. He smiled grimly to himself as he drew back the curtain and stood a moment looking out of the window of his bedroom after he had dressed. It surely was not an ideal marriage morning, with full-throated songbirds hymning his epithalamium, and all the bluegrass meadows wafting sweetest odors townward in honor of his bridal. He had dreamed of a day like that, when the whole earth should share in his exuberant gladness, when the skies should be blue in benediction and the very trees of the forest murmurous of his joy — a day of golden sunshine, of spring, of hope, of tenderest love. There was something touching in the wistfulness of the expression that came into his gray eyes as he gazed out upon the barren November scene, slim and elegant in his wedding

THE INVISIBLE BOND

clothes, yet with so little of the look of the lover about him.

He had grown much thinner, and he seemed at first glance even younger and more boyishly appealing than on that summer morning at the station when he made his cyclonic ingress into the waiting-room for the purpose of offering a delinquent welcome to Marian Day. But he was the stripling still only in outline, and it would have been a very superficial observation that failed to see the lines of grief, and pain, and passionate renunciation that recently had traced themselves about the sensitive mouth.

He was calm. Through the entire night he had slept as quietly as if no unusual event awaited him on the morrow, untroubled by painful dreams or any of the haunting thoughts which, until the week before, when the day of his wedding had been definitely determined upon, had made it well-nigh impossible for him to obtain the needed rest. The hour for doubt and questioning was past. The situation was upon him, and he was prepared to meet it, if without the ardor of a lover, at least with the fine feeling of a gentleman.

But from the first there had been no uncertainty in his mind as to what his course should be; the only problem that presented itself to him for solution was whether his own ability, spiritual and practical, was

FOR HIS OATH'S SAKE

large enough and sure enough for the tremendous requirement that was before him. Thus far he had not solved it with any degree of confidence. But that did not alter his decision. He had given his word, and he must keep it. The whole thing was so very simple. There were many influences at work in him to drive him toward that position. The traditions of the fathers as expressed in a dashing Southern chivalry, superb, poetic, faulty, so sternly exacting with regard to man's surface relation to woman, so easily lax with regard to his deeper acts and intents toward her, spoke to him with an authority that he was powerless to combat. His heredity, his training, his every instinct compelled him to allegiance, regardless of all consequences. His word must be kept inviolate.

But the noiseless law of the spiritual world, even more terribly real than that of the physical, takes no account of man's blindness. It is his business to seek after Truth, if haply he may discover it, and failing to do this, the result is not altered because through ignorance he did the thing that contains in itself the germ of his destruction. And though to Roger Bolling there came with his decision of marriage a sort of tranquillity that seemed to soothe and strengthen, it was in reality the ease of apathy, rather than of inward peace — the sign of the cessation of struggle and of inevitable retrogression from his loftiest and tenderest

THE INVISIBLE BOND

ideals; so that in declining to a lower plane of feeling, and in endeavoring to find in Marian Day compensation for his loss, he was unconsciously compelling himself to become a partaker of her nature, while merely trying to make the best of things, as he honestly believed.

His wedding was to be the simplest occasion possible. Out of deference to his bereavement Mrs. Caldwell had reluctantly agreed that there should be no guests, but it was only after Roger had quietly and steadfastly refused to give way to her that she had finally yielded her wishes with respect to a wedding breakfast. She was even less reconciled when the day rolled round.

"It is too bad that he wouldn't let me have it," she grieved, as she hurried about Marian helping her to dress, "and it was going to be such a good breakfast, too, for I had thought of all sorts of delicious things. I lay awake one whole night planning it. And who would have believed that Roger could be so obstinate? Oh, dear, to think this dreary morning should be anybody's wedding-day!"

"There would scarcely have been time," replied Marian, absent-mindedly, as she leaned critically toward her mirror. She turned her head slightly to one side and then deftly pinned one of Roger's roses in her hair. "You know that as soon as I can get out

FOR HIS OATH'S SAKE

of this and into something else we shall have to hurry off to the train."

She wore a white mull gown very plainly made, yet not without a certain distinction of its own which Mrs. Caldwell found difficult to interpret, 'delighting as she herself did always in frills and furbelows. She studied it carefully, standing off to one side.

"If only it had had billows and billows of lace!" she exclaimed, ruefully. "Still you do look lovely, my dear, lovely, though there is not one woman in a thousand who could carry off anything so unadorned. It just suits you somehow. Everything you make for yourself has that look. I don't know how you manage it. It must be that superb figure of yours and not special skill. Any woman could have made that gown, but most likely she would have looked a frump in it, as a reward for her exertion, while you — whom shall I liken you too? — Aphrodite, just risen from the waves, with sea foam all about her?"

"I hope I am a more modest individual," responded Marian, with a laugh. "But don't decry my raiment; elegance is not purchased at fifty cents a yard. That last ten dollars had to accomplish much."

Mrs. Caldwell came nearer the dressing-table. "I did so want to give you your wedding gown, Marian," she said, very gently.

Marian was coaxing a stray lock into place, and it

THE INVISIBLE BOND

seemed to require her undivided attention. "Oh, did you?" she inquired, carelessly, at length, "how very nice of you!"

"I pictured you in ivory satin and point lace; and I have some old, old lace that has come down to me through five generations, and I was going to let you wear that, if only —"

Marian displayed a mild interest. "If only — what?" she asked, with a swift turning of the head and one of her glimmering smiles.

"If only I had not been afraid."

"Afraid?" Marian shrugged her shoulders. Then she laughed softly. "I have been so long an eleemosynary, I wonder that you hesitated."

Mrs. Caldwell looked slightly confused. She dropped her eyes, and her plump person encased in rose-colored silk and chiffon heaved convulsively. "It really wasn't you, my dear, so much as — Roger that I feared."

"Oh!" exclaimed Marian, without a shade of annoyance, "I see."

"He is so very proud, you know," said Mrs. Caldwell, hurriedly and suddenly floundering; "that is, I mean, he is rather fanciful, and somehow — I really can't explain it — but I felt sure that he would not want any stranger — of course I am not exactly a stranger — but, oh, I just knew he wouldn't want

FOR HIS OATH'S SAKE

me to do it, and that he would far rather that his bride should come to him just as you are now. You see I am beginning to stand quite in awe of him."

Marian went over to the fireplace and sat down in the large chintz-covered chair drawn up before it. She yawned. "I can't say that I find him particularly formidable," she said.

"It is because he is so determined," responded Mrs. Caldwell. "You see how he did about the breakfast. I had not the remotest idea of giving in to him at first, but he had his way. I never would have agreed to it, though, if I had known it was going to be such a cloudy morning."

"Are people especially hungry when the sun doesn't shine?"

Mrs. Caldwell was sitting on the edge of her chair, her silk flounces spread out like the petals of an inverted rose. "I don't know, but it surely would have been cheerfuller. I doubt that Roger has eaten anything, and I just can't keep from thinking how his mother would have felt to have him go off on an empty stomach like that."

"He isn't going on an empty stomach, he is going on the cars, and you might reserve a few of your anxieties for me, even if I did eat two birds and half a dozen buckwheat cakes and two or three rolls, with coffee besides."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Oh, but you are always so cool and collected."

"You remind me of the reply of Talleyrand to Madame de Staël. She asked, if she and her rival Madame Grandt were to fall into the water at the same time and were drowning, which he would save first. He said, 'Oh, Madame, you swim so well.'"

"You do everything so well, my dear, even including getting married. I never saw any one quite as composed," replied Mrs. Caldwell, missing the delicate sarcasm, and not sure whether to admire or not. She had been such a fluttering, palpitating bride herself, and she had supposed it was so distinctly the proper way for a bride to be, that she could not quite comprehend Marian's nonchalance. A doubt was beginning to awaken in her mind, and it sent a cold shiver through her, adding another weight to the burden she already carried in relation to this marriage. That Roger loved the woman who in ten more minutes would be standing by his side echoing his own vows of fidelity until death she had never for an instant doubted. But did Marian love him? During the past week Mrs. Caldwell had been almost too excited over the uncomfortable position which the girl's strong will had compelled her to take, too oppressed by the thought that she might not shift even a little of her own accountability to Tim's strong shoulders, to think of much besides. She herself had married for love,

FOR HIS OATH'S SAKE

and in a case like the present one, where the usual sordid bribe of wealth was non-existent, it seemed only reasonable to conclude that there was no unworthy motive. She was an odd combination of the practical and the sentimental, and while she could understand any amount of devotion that might be given to Roger for his own sake, she was shrewd enough to know that it was not for such manly qualities as he possessed that women are apt to sell themselves. Even his high breeding and important social place scarcely seemed a sufficiently tempting bait, in view of his poverty.

But Marian's conduct had been baffling. She wished that she might put her to some sort of test. She leaned forward suddenly, her piquant, sallow little face eager and almost imploring. Her voice trembled a little.

"Marian," she asked, "is everything clear before you? Do you love Roger with all your heart and soul — as much as he loves you?"

There was a moment's silence. The hands of the little gilt clock on the mantel were moving steadily onward. Marian watched them intently. She smiled. "I think I can assure you," she answered, without moving her head, "that I love him quite as much as he loves me."

The words were crisp, and clear-cut, and final, and Mrs. Caldwell, who had hoped for something different

THE INVISIBLE BOND

— the vivid flush, the faltering speech, the tell-tale manner with which she as a bride would have responded to such an inquiry, drew back only partially reassured. With a little sigh she rose, and turned to the mantel.

“I have something for you here,” she said, searching among the bric-à-brac, “I hid it, because I wanted to give it to you just at the last moment.”

“What!” cried Marian, becoming animated in an instant, “Something besides that exquisite emerald necklace?”

“Oh, but this is something different. It quite puts to shame that modern thing I gave you. Old jewelry makes the new seem always vulgar.” She took from the mantel a small jewel case, opened it, and held it out.

It was an antique cameo pin set in two little rows of pearls, and it possessed that fine, intangible something, apart from its beauty, that seemed to link one instantly with the past — a past of luxury, of culture, of refinement. Marian took it into her hands and surveyed it with her usual cool scrutiny, but made no comment.

“It is an heirloom, and I could not of course give it to you, if I had any children to inherit from me,” remarked Mrs. Caldwell, her eyes taking on the wistful look that motherly, childless women so often wear

FOR HIS OATH'S SAKE

when referring to their lack. "But it was yours before I ever gave it to you."

Marian raised her head and waited inquiringly.

"I had already given it to Roger's wife, whoever she might be."

"Oh, I understand."

"I had it on one day and he simply went wild over it in his boyish, enthusiastic fashion. I told him then it should be among his wife's wedding gifts. It never occurred to me that I wasn't giving it to Sibyl Fontaine," remarked Mrs. Caldwell, simply.

Marian closed the case. She sat looking for a moment into the fire. "I believe I won't take it," she said at length, as she quietly handed it back.

"Don't you like it?" Mrs. Caldwell was completely taken by surprise.

"It is lovely, but I have a superstition about old jewelry; I should rather not have it."

"Superstition! But the superstition is all in favor of it. You should have on

'Something old, and something new,
Something borrowed and something blue.'

"I have on something blue — my garters," said Marian, quickly gathering up her skirts. "Behold them! Don't you think I would make a nice ballet girl?"

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"But, Marian —" Mrs. Caldwell was almost tearfully urgent.

Nevertheless, Marian was not to be persuaded. "Keep it," she said, with a hard little laugh, as she sank back into her chair again, "keep it — for Roger's second wife."

There was a step on the asphalt below, and Mrs. Caldwell's attention was distracted. She flew to the window. Suddenly the tears sprang into her eyes.

She stood so still and was so silent that Marian careened her neck and sat looking toward her in surprise.

"Is it the clergyman who is to marry us?" she asked.

"Mr. Eldridge has been here for the last half hour. He is in the library talking to Tim."

Mrs. Caldwell's voice was tremulous, and she replied without turning her head, still looking down upon the slim figure advancing up the walk. But she was thinking less of Roger than of Roger's mother in that moment. All at once she wheeled and looked at Marian. The little woman's whole form was quivering under a sense of the momentous. She was smiling through her tears, and her manner showed a curious commingling of roguishness and gravity, of affection and timorous appeal.

"It is Roger," she said, softly, waiting to see the color flame into the pearl-white face.

FOR HIS OATH'S SAKE

But Marian sat without moving a muscle, and her color did not change. Mrs. Caldwell crossed the room swiftly, her little ruffles making a delicate swirl as she turned. She leaned over the back of the chair, and then bent forward until her lips touched the girl's forehead.

"Come," she whispered, growing pale, "come."

PART II

THE SUBTLE THING THAT'S SPIRIT



CHAPTER I

RED ROSES

It was midsummer again in Kentucky, and it was, moreover, the initial day of the great fair — that time-honored institution of profit and amusement which traces back to the early days of the Commonwealth, and which, beginning with the simplest of rural exhibits modeled upon the English cattle show, gradually took on many of the features of the English county fair, at last developing into the present splendid, varied display at which, with deep-rooted pride, and the characteristic fun-loving spirit of their species, yearly many thousands of Kentuckians congregate.

To-day, the opening one of the carnival, all interest was concentrated on a single event: an extensive floral parade in which many beautiful and prominent women were to participate, and for the nonce the fleet-footed racer and the mild-eyed Jersey were relegated to the background; even the "Plaza," that most bewildering and delightful of places, the tempting abode of the snake-charmer and the mind-reading

THE INVISIBLE BOND

dog, of Japanese acrobats and dancing girls, was scarcely thought of, though it was well known that "Evaleen, the peerless water queen," was advertised to eat, drink, sew, and sleep in a glass tank filled with water, and that three intrepid bicyclists would "ride at the rate of a mile a minute on a circular-built fence at an angle thrillingly near the perpendicular."

As the day wore on the crowd became more and more dense, and by two o'clock, when the long floral procession moved from the town, a most impatient and perspiring throng to the number of ten or more thousands awaited it, its start having been heralded by a wild pealing of bells, supplemented by the din of factory whistles and the sound of martial music.

In the field across the tract hundreds of vehicles were lined up, whose occupants gaily laughed and chatted, all unmindful of the scorching August sun. One of the last to arrive was a tally-ho coach containing six persons, and it swept into the paddock with quite an air, the white veils of the women floating in cloud-like abandon, and their voices blending merrily with a recurrent masculine undertone. On the front seat a pale, dark woman, with an impassive, somewhat wearied countenance, sat surveying the scene with languid interest, sometimes turning her head to make a remark to the laughing girls and their escorts behind, but giving her main attention to the man next

RED ROSES

to her. The woman was rather pretty in a cold, unresponsive way, and she appeared as wholly unaware of the gaze and comment their advent had called forth as if she were alone. It was, however, a divided scrutiny that was being bestowed upon her, quite as many glances as were given to her being directed to the distinguished looking and more self-conscious individual at her side, whose thin skin had flushed a little above his Vandyke beard.

"It's that pretty Mrs. Sullivan," whispered a girl in the neighboring carriage, "and the man with her is Mr. Waller—Francis Waller, the famous author, you know. Isn't he stunning? He is visiting her at her country place. Here, turn your head just a little, but don't stare at them, for the sake of the honor of Lexington; it seems so provincial."

"I shall not stare at them for the sake of the honor of myself," declared the other girl with spirit. All the same she turned her head, the promptings of aroused curiosity being irresistible. "She is only a tiny bit pretty," she added, disdainfully, "and I think it was simply detestable of her to marry that horrid man she did, just for his money."

"How do you know she did that? Do take a look at the celebrity."

Francis Waller was bowing low, having caught the eye of an acquaintance, that curious commingling of

THE INVISIBLE BOND

insolence and deference, of self-esteem and self-abasement, that to the observant was never quite absent from his manner, being to-day especially pronounced. In truth, he had been studying the crowd with a quiet scorn, one instant possessed of a sort of secret wonderment that his appearance apparently did not call forth more than a brief and passing notice, attention having wandered to some later arrival, the next, cut and annoyed by the easy indifference to his greatness, reminding himself of the little he had accomplished, and vowing renewed fidelity to his work. Though by no means unappealed to by the picturesqueness of the occasion, and meaning some day to write a tender and glowing bucolic inspired by his visits to Kentucky, he was yet at the moment too occupied with the thought of his immediate conspicuousness and the effect it had produced to be keenly alive to anything save his own sensitivity. The pose of the great artist was something that he was unable for an instant to abandon. He had grown stouter, the most elegant of clothing being inadequate to conceal the unfortunate fact, and his hair was thinner, the suspicion of baldness which a year before had begun to appear on the crown of his head having become almost a reality. His manner was nervous and slightly irritable, and he turned with a start as a small boy near the coach lifted up his voice and yelled at the first glimpses of the approaching parade.

RED ROSES

An instant afterward a shout from thousands of throats rent the air, and to the sound of drums and bugles the pageant came into view — city officials, county officials, secret societies, men in white, men in red, Sir Knights, Exalted Rulers, glittering marshals, with bands, and equipages, and automobiles swathed in bunting, passed before the sight in bewildering splendor, and seemingly stretching out *ad infinitum*.

For a while the crowd gazed and applauded, then the spectacle seemed to pall. People were beginning to move uneasily, and to be conscious of their discomfort as they sweltered beneath the fiery sapphire sky. The zest of the thing was waning when interest was again revived. A tiny cart with two children in it drawn by a Shetland pony trundled into the ring and paused before the judge's stand. The cart was decorated with pink and white chrysanthemums and in the manner to make it resemble a basket of flowers; out of it two piquant little faces peeped eagerly expectant. It was followed almost immediately by other vehicles, every color of the rainbow being represented, until the scene was like an immense, variegated garden on wheels, each of the long line of equipages and its occupants vying with the rest and each being the avowed choice of many. The verdict, however, as to which should receive the first prize had gradually settled down in favor of a victoria containing two very

THE INVISIBLE BOND

young girls in white and purple, the decorations being snow-balls and purple irises, when the last of all the vehicles appeared. It was a bower of American beauty roses and it was drawn by two black horses with white harness. It contained a single occupant, a beautiful woman in diaphanous white, who was driving. At first sight of it the cheering broke forth anew, only to gather volume when the carriage drew nearer, and the features of the woman became more distinguishable. As the sunlight fell upon her red-brown hair Francis Waller leaned quickly forward and adjusted his eyeglasses.

“Ah!” he said, quickly, under his breath, “Ah!”

His companion’s pale face had taken on something like a look of animation, and she watched the carriage as it passed and repassed with a generous admiration untinctured by any sort of envy. She had once been beautiful and, now that her looks were fading, she felt no disposition to deny to other women anything that was theirs. Perhaps she had learned that beauty means little to the possessor when it does not bring its crowning guerdon, love. She too leaned a little forward.

“Mrs. Roger Bolling!” she exclaimed. “How lovely she is! I do hope she will win; her carriage is the very prettiest of them all.”

Marian had paused before the judge’s stand, her

RED ROSES

spirited team chafing under the momentary restraint. There was a brief period of breathless waiting, then the carriage wheeled, and the blue ribbon was fluttering from the harness.

"She has it!" cried the girls and young men of the coach in chorus, joining in the wild applause. Francis Waller sat staring in the direction of the approaching vehicle, but he did not clap his hands, and his face was not easy to read. Not once had he taken his eyes off the carriage, but whether his gaze expressed approval or not Mrs. Sullivan could not decide. His fastidiousness kept her constantly on a strain, and somewhat did away with her pleasure in his distinguished society. Possibly he was thinking that the whole thing was tawdry and vulgar, and she was half ashamed of having committed herself. She determined to test him.

"Don't you think her beautiful?" she asked. "Look at her through this."

He put up the field-glasses very coolly and quite as if his attention were directed for the first time to Marian's smooth, clear-cut features.

"Very beautiful," he responded, gravely, at length.

"Do you know her?"

"I have met her."

"I hear that her husband is immensely clever — quite the most promising of the young men at the bar here. I wish that we might have them at our house.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

I asked him once or twice before his marriage, but he never accepted. I wonder —" she hesitated a moment, and began counting on her fingers — "I wonder if they would care to come to the little dinner we are having to-morrow evening?"

"You might ask them; it would be an excellent way to find out."

"Are you sure you are not superstitious?"

He turned, and for the first time removed his gaze from the rose-covered carriage parading in full view.

"Not in the least," he responded. "Why?"

"Because they will make thirteen."

"Perhaps it would be a means of discovering whether sudden death or dire misfortune does really follow in the wake of the fateful number. For my part I am willing to risk it."

The carriage was bowling slowly in their direction again. Marian was smiling and bowing to acquaintances as she passed. She was radiant, and she was more than ever like some gorgeous tropical bloom in her floral setting. She had grown rounder of form, but the gracious, sinuous curves remained, her increase of flesh merely giving a more womanly accent to her beauty. It was only when the smile died off her face that there was the suggestion of latent hardness, a peculiar expression that traced itself on her features now and then, not easily translatable, and that set one

RED ROSES

to wondering about her. It was an indefinite, indefinable something that one felt rather than saw, and it was of a part with her evident pleasure in this exhibition of herself, which was of a nature distinctly different from that of the other maids and matrons, their enjoyment being of a simpler and more spontaneous order, more like play than earnest, and partaking of the same spirit of fun that shone in the faces of the two roguish children.

Mrs. Sullivan was no nearer than before to obtaining a clue to the author's opinion either as regarded the parade in general or the winner of the first prize in particular. She knew that some people detested paper flowers. But a strange thing happened. As she glanced at him she noticed for the first time that he wore a red rose in the lapel of his coat.

"Why, you have on her colors!" she exclaimed as Marian drew near. He started.

It was purely accidental, his selection and wearing voice speaking to him roused him to an unthinking, romantic impulse. He was looking straight ahead of him and his gaze was fixed on Marian's face. The coach was drawn up quite close to the fence. A number of vehicles were moving homeward now. The track was crowded, so that the nearest one, the one covered with red roses, was within only a few feet of the field as it passed. Just as the carriage came into full view

THE INVISIBLE BOND

he rose and, taking the flower from his button-hole, flung it straight into the lap of its occupant, a whimsical smile chasing itself across his features.

There was a ripple of laughter from all that saw it, and Marian turned her head quickly. A startled look came into her face, and a vivid flush swept to her brows. Francis Waller, still smiling, made her a profound obeisance, half mocking, half serious.

For the briefest space her eyelids flickered. Then she returned his gaze with a smile as daring as his own, looking deep into his greenish eyes with an expression that set his pulses tingling. An instant afterwards, with a distant bow that included both him and his companions she passed on.

CHAPTER II

THE LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY

It was six o'clock of the same afternoon, and Roger Bolling, wearied from the exertion of an especially busy day and the garrulity of a belated client, who had kept him at the office some time after his usual hour for leaving, was walking slowly up the little path leading to his house with an air of abstraction, his mind still laboring with the knotty legal point which had just been propounded to him. Since his marriage he had thrown himself with a mighty zeal and determination into his profession, a sort of iron-bound resolution that was in a measure the result not only of necessity but of a passionate and desperate longing to wrest from life something in exchange for what was denied him, holding him to his work, and giving to his naturally energetic disposition a stimulus that was a never-failing goad. At times, as during the summer preceding his engagement, he worked irrationally, with an almost reckless disregard for health and a kind of intensity of concentration.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

He dared not probe too deeply into the primal motive that was back of all this, lest it rise up and confront him as the pale ghost of what was once a noble impulse. Formerly, he well knew, it had not been ambition alone that had swayed him. Though he had felt always the usual normal, healthful desire for a prosperous issue as a result of his labors, and that in a more compelling degree, perhaps, than most, there had yet been something more that had held him manfully to his purpose: a certain quiet earnestness at the root of his nature, that, despite his gaiety and apparent light-heartedness, forced him to regard all effort from the standpoint of the spiritual import; so that his shy, boyish confession to Sibyl Fontaine as the two had sat together in the moonlit garden on the night before her departure more than a year before had been in truth a revelation of the groundwork upon which rested his loftiest aims, just as it was a lifting of the veil that concealed his most sacred and intimate emotions.

Then he had meant to be, as he had told her, in a large sense a Man, with all that that should stand for both with regard to others and to himself. The simple sincerity of the utterance, the unshaken faith in himself and his own ideals, the deep thrill and throb and hope of it all—ah, what would he not have given to feel them once again!

Yet all unconscious to himself there had been taking

LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY

place within him a growth in the very direction toward which he had then aspired. Marriage either definitely elevates or degrades; it never allows a being to remain in a seemingly stationary state; and, through his inharmonious mating and his later resistance to its tendency to drag him downward, gradually there came to him a new and profounder understanding with regard to the vital relations of life. Hitherto his attitude toward the great elemental passions of humanity had been merely that of an undeveloped personality, soundly healthful on its physical side, but only dimly comprehending the harmonious duality of its own nature, its tremendous exactions, its inherent needs; and, in coming to realize that the individual nature is thus dual, the flesh and the spirit, he saw, in its large significance, that humanity also is dual, the man and the woman, thus attaining, out of a deep sense of awe and reverence for his own being, to the idea of the unity of marriage, and thence to a clearer apprehension of the mystery of the incarnation — the oneness of the Divine with the human.

Already, though crudely as yet, through the workings of this broader understanding of the underlying symbolism of life, he was beginning to perceive the profundity of the error he had committed in the name of righteousness. All his props seemed to be falling from him. Conscience, which at first had spoken so

THE INVISIBLE BOND

loudly, had grown shy and unresponsive to him now. All the strength, all the opposition he possessed was at times brought into play against the siren voice luring him to his doom, and it was only after many a hard fight with himself that he conquered the impulse to succumb and to allow the earth side the predominance that it clamored for. For there was still that in him which sometimes Marian could appeal to. He could not elevate her to his standard; and it was with a sort of diabolical pride on her part and a sense of humiliation on his that she was able temporarily, and through the power of her own seductions, to bring him down to hers.

But to-day he was tired and careworn, and in no mood to hasten into his wife's presence. The air had grown cooler, and as he went up the path he took off his hat, a very natural action with him always, instinctively resorted to when out of doors alone and safe from observation, and let the light wind play against his hot brow, finding relief to his jaded senses in the soft caress. It was the hour at which his mother, serene, gracefully gowned and expectant, used to sit in the little drawing-room, quietly anticipating his coming, and with all the ceremony with which she would have awaited the arrival of a prince. No engagement of any kind was ever allowed to interfere with the obligation she felt to welcome him when he

LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY

should come back to her at the close of his day's work, eager for the comfort of her presence. Out of the many vicissitudes that the day might hold there was one thing she wished him to be sure of as safe from all mutation: her attitude of changeless love and of calm abiding. As his feet rested upon the first step of the little vine-covered porch the old heart-sickness and longing that were still often as present with him as in the early weeks of his bereavement came back to him, and a mist gathered in his eyes.

The house was very still, although the doors and windows were thrown wide, indicating life and movement somewhere, despite the momentary quietude. Marian doubtless was away, he concluded, and before going up-stairs to prepare for dinner he sat down on the long, green-painted settle on the side of the porch and picked up the evening *Leader*, which had just been thrown in.

His eye ran carelessly down the first page. The paper, as indicated by the headlines, seemed to be given over mainly to enthusiastic descriptions of the fair, interlarded with frequent reference to Lexington as "the Unrivalled Queen," and the surrounding region as "God's Country," the scribe, following the usual Kentucky fashion, evidently being by no means backward in proclaiming his particular quarter of the globe preeminent, as well as the special object of divine favor.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Suddenly Roger started and caught in his breath, his glance attracted by something in another column. "Mrs. Roger Bolling the Lovely Winner of the First Prize in the Floral Parade"! he read in astonishment. But surely there was some mistake. She had not even told him of her intention to take part in such an exhibition. He sat holding the paper in his hands, staring at it in complete surprise. Then he turned to the paragraph referred to in the headlines, and read it through. His face flushed, and a look of annoyance swept across his features.

But gradually his expression altered. The sweetness and chivalry of his nature began to assert themselves. He could not allow himself anything like a feeling of irritation toward her; it seemed to him so small, so unworthy, and yet — why had she not told him? Was it because she feared he would oppose her in this public parading of herself? He pondered the thing. Since their marriage they had accepted no invitations, and the retirement in which she had been compelled to live out of respect for his bereavement he more than suspected was not to her liking. Perhaps he had been selfish, he told himself, confronted by this rather pronounced evidence of her desire for a less secluded existence. Admiration, he knew, to her tropical temperament was as much an essential as sunlight is to most orders of plants. Without it the

LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY

very essence of her being seemed to change. Of late she had been listless and even apathetic, leaving him unmolested to his work, spending her evenings not unfrequently in her own apartments with a novel while he delved in the library below.

As Roger sat thinking there came to him, in exchange for his momentary annoyance, a feeling of self-condemnation, and he found himself, with the instinct of all fine natures, manfully shifting the blame from the one who had seemed to cause his disturbance to himself. All at once he rose, having first folded the paper so that the column he had just read should be given special prominence. Then he went quickly up the stairs and knocked softly on his wife's door, still holding the paper in his hand.

There was a response, and he entered.

Marian was sitting in a loose white gown before her dressing-table lazily combing out her hair. Her arms and throat were bare, and as the departing rays of sunshine fell full upon them they shone like polished marble. Now and then a stray sunbeam as she turned her head from side to side rested upon her hair and then seemed to become entangled in its tawny interstices, transforming the whole into "a golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men." She had evidently been sleeping just a short time before, and her

THE INVISIBLE BOND

expression was relaxed, a delicate rose tint still lingering in one cheek where it had pressed against the pillow. She had mistaken Roger's entrance for that of the maid coming to wake her, and she took no notice, proceeding with her combing in an absorbed fashion, and keeping her eyes upon the mirror with an intensity of gaze in which a variety of emotions mingled. All at once a little thrill of delight in her own beauty seemed to sweep through her, and she leaned toward her own reflection, and smiled. The comb fell from her hand, and as Roger sprang forward to restore it to her, she turned and saw him for the first time.

There was a swift rush of crimson to her brow, and her bosom beneath its soft gown heaved convulsively. "I thought you were Susan," she said, guiltily, fingering the articles on her dressing table, at random, and for once completely disconcerted.

He had been gazing at her rapt and motionless, some subtle emanation from the secret excitement she was under communicating itself to him and weaving a spell around him which made him powerless to stir. He had scarcely seemed to breathe. But as the comb slid from her grasp he had suddenly come to himself.

"I am glad you did think I was Susan," he tried to say lightly, as he flung himself down on the Turkish lounge near the window, "as otherwise I might have lost a very lovely picture." He gathered up one of the

LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY

many sofa pillows about him and studied it. He flushed a little as he spoke and looked away in a sort of odd, boyish embarrassment, as if the remark had been made to the veriest stranger.

Marian shot a quick glance at him from under her curling lashes.

"Praise from my husband ought to be delightful if only for the sake of its novelty."

The tone was cool and premeditated, yet scarcely reproachful. She had turned again to her mirror and with deft movements was twisting her hair into place. Her manner had resumed its usual quiet unconcern, or half sullen indifference toward everything about her.

He was silent, and then, as she continued to ignore him, suddenly he leaned forward and handed her the evening paper. He was smiling.

"It would seem," he observed, "that you have had the praise of many beside your husband to-day."

She faced him again, startled in spite of herself. She looked straight into his eyes, but she was unable to read the expression she saw there.

"You are annoyed, of course," she said, quickly, and on the defensive instantly.

"Am I?" he asked. "Why do you conclude that?"

"Because you belong to that particular class of men who would like to throw around their woman-kind the seclusion of a harem."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Roger threw back his head and laughed aloud, his face growing almost instantly grave again. But he said nothing.

"I have discovered that it is a Kentucky trait," she continued, reaching for another hairpin. "Here a married woman may be beautiful, and she quite frequently is, but she must desire to be beautiful for her husband alone, else she may call down upon herself not only his disapproval but that of a whole community besides. With him it is merely an expression of the old savage instinct of mastery over the thing he chooses to think belongs to him, a survival of the slave idea; with the rest it is usually envy."

"And was it because you were so sure of my disapproval that you did not mention to me beforehand your part in the performance described here?"

His voice was troubled, but it was without a trace of resentment. On the contrary there was in it a lingering note of appeal, as if even yet he was clinging to some floating fragment from the wreck of his lost happiness, and with the blind hope of reconstruction. It is so difficult when one is still young to settle down into patient acceptance of the irremediable. Daily the separation between them had been growing wider. This act of hers, unimportant in itself, but which had taken on a special significance through the fact that she had allowed it to become somewhat of the nature

LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY

of a revolt, had begun to mark a new period in their marital relations. It seemed to reduce them to the low and vulgar plane of the outwardly incompatible. Perhaps it was his breeding that suffered most, the mental and emotional parts of him being shielded from her power greatly to hurt, through the melancholy realization that had early come to him.

"Was it because of that?" he repeated, a look of profound sadness showing on the young face.

She thought a moment before she answered him, idly slipping off and on her wedding ring, and tapping the floor with her foot. All at once she wheeled and sat sidewise in her chair, throwing one arm over the back. Then she met his gaze a trifle defiantly, and with something like a return to her old nonchalance, as her lips curled in a slow smile.

"Yes," she responded, steadily, "it was because of that — just that."

"I am sorry that you didn't tell me, Marian."

"That I didn't give you the opportunity to object?"

"I should not have objected."

She looked up quickly. "You mean —"

"I mean simply that if you have a taste for that sort of thing I do not see upon what reasonable grounds I can oppose you in gratifying it. There is something almost ludicrous in the strange idea you seem to have taken up with regard to me — if you will pardon me

THE INVISIBLE BOND

for saying so. Have I ever" — he hesitated an instant, and then met her eyes very gravely—"have I ever shown myself in any way tryannical toward you?"

She laughed softly to herself. "Perhaps you half suspected that I do not belong to the meek, down-trodden order."

He winced a little under the evident sarcasm of the fling, and colored. "I should have said exacting," he supplemented, quickly, boyishly awkward in the presence of her coolness, which made her seem many years older than himself.

She was silent a long time, looking down at the rug at her feet. Presently she gave a wearied shrug of the shoulders as if dismissing the subject from her thoughts. "You have not been in the least exacting," she said; "I exonerate you wholly. A man is only exacting with the woman who has once aroused his jealous feeling, and you must admit that my opportunities for doing anything like that have been limited. Then she quoted lightly:

"'For patience she will prove a second Grissel
And Roman Lucrece for her chastity.'

What is it, Susan?" she broke off, "come in, and don't stand there knocking. Ah, a note for me? Bring it to me. Is some one waiting for an answer?"

She opened the envelope quickly, not glancing at the superscription, her fingers trembling a little, and her

LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY

face flushing with excitement, while Roger sat watching her wonderingly. She had quite forgotten his very presence even. Her breath was coming tumultuously, and her lips were parted, as if she were seeking eagerly to drink in the contents of the note by an actual physical movement, just as if it were in reality the sparkling draught she anticipated. Her eyes glowed dark and luminous, and she turned her head to one side, in order that the light might fall better upon the page, with an almost girlish coquetry.

But at first sight of the penmanship within she gave a little gasp of disappointment. It was not what she had expected. The note was written in a nondescript feminine handwriting and phrased in language the most conventional. However, as her glance fell upon the closing sentence her expression quickly altered again. It was this: "I venture to hope that we have a special inducement to offer in the presence of Mr. Francis Waller, who will be with us for several days. He tells me that he knows Mr. Bolling quite well, and that he has also had the pleasure of meeting you."

Marian slipped the note back into its envelope. Her excitement had become controlled, but she was unable to keep a certain anxiety out of her voice when she next spoke, though she was plainly trying to appear unconcerned. She first dismissed the maid, telling

THE INVISIBLE BOND

her to return in five minutes. Then she glanced at Roger.

"This is from Mrs. Sullivan," she said; "she is asking us to dine with her to-morrow evening at eight o'clock. Shall we accept?"

Roger had been leaning on one elbow supported by many sofa pillows which he had piled up in a heap in a corner of the lounge. At her inquiry he raised himself quickly.

"I am so sorry, Marian," he was beginning with genuine regret, but she interrupted.

"I wish to go," she said, decisively, a swift flame sweeping from neck to brow.

He gazed at her in dumb bewilderment at the unmistakable anger of her look and tone.

"Yes, but —"

"Up to this time I have declined everything, without an exception, out of regard for — for your loss, but it is not just or kind that you should expect me to keep on doing that sort of thing forever."

He turned his face away, more stung by her unfeeling reference to his sorrow than if she had brutally raised her hand and struck him. Presently he rose and went over and stood a moment at the window looking out into the gathering summer twilight, yet seeing nothing save an undistinguishable blur of objects before his eyes. Some bees were droning in the honeysuckle

LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY

down below. When he turned finally he had grown very pale, but his manner seemed to have taken on a new calm and dignity.

"I know that it has been very dreary for you here," he said at last in a low voice, as he stood before her, resting one hand on the dressing-table, his fingers now and then wandering aimlessly among the little cut-glass and silver receptacles and feminine trifles with which it was strewn. Somehow he found it almost too difficult a thing to accomplish, to bring himself to meet her eyes. A great shame for her most unexpected outbreak was filling him with a sort of pity for her. The words that he sought for would not come easily.

"It surely has," she responded, all at once breaking into a light spasmodic laughter, and seeking to give another turn to his seriousness. But she was nervous and her gaiety sounded forced and mirthless.

He went on quite gravely. "I can well believe that it has been like that. I am so sorry; I am trying to understand. One of the things I came in just now for was to say to you that I thought it would be best that we should go out more. I am afraid that I have been very selfish; my work is so absorbing, and I never cared a straw for society. I can see that a woman might think about it very differently, and I want to put myself in your place, as far as I may be able, and try to get your point of view. My mother had many

THE INVISIBLE BOND

friends here, and for her sake I am sure that they will wish to be especially civil to you."

"People get tired of inviting those that never respond," she replied, with her eyes on the ceiling.

"I mean that they shall not get tired of inviting us for that reason," he said, cheerfully, "for we shall respond with the utmost alacrity. I am going to turn over a new leaf and drag you into all sorts of tiresome things. I may even risk being described like the hero of the little poem I shall recite to you:

"There was a young man so benighted,
He never knew when he was slighted;
He went to a party,
And ate just as hearty,
As if he'd been really invited."

"And yet we are not to begin with the Sullivans?" she asked, the eagerness once more returning to her voice. She was breathing quickly, and she leaned a little toward him, her whole being expressing an intensity of desire for his acquiescence.

"We can't; you have invited the Caldwells here in honor of my birthday."

She drew back, a great relief in her eyes. "Oh!" she cried, "is it that, only that? I will telephone them not to come, and I will write at once and accept this. I had forgotten all about them; they have been so long away."

He looked at her very quietly, for the first time meeting her eyes.

LIGHT THAT LED ASTRAY

"You asked them three days ago," he said, "and they promised to be here. If any other invitations have come to them, they must have declined them; so that to tell them at this late hour that you would rather go somewhere else than stay here and receive them is a thing that is hardly to be considered, particularly as we have scarcely seen them since their return."

"You put it so baldly. I am sure that they would understand."

"At all events we will not take the chances on their failure to do so."

She gave him a quick little glance and decided to change her tactics. She rose and stood by his side, linking her arm in his, and pressing close against him.

"Roger — please!" she whispered. "Don't be silly; I do so want to go."

He neither accepted nor repelled her caress. He only stood looking dumbly at her, surprised that she should, even after he had reminded her, still wish to show this discourtesy to the two people who had most befriended her in all the world.

"I am sorry," he replied, at length, "but it is impossible."

She turned away, and again he was conscious of the low ground-swell of anger rising in her. She

THE INVISIBLE BOND

moved across the room to her writing-desk and opened it.

“Will you send Susan?” she said, icily, over her shoulder. And Roger, feeling himself to be dismissed, like a child who has behaved itself unseemly, bowed and left the room in silence.

CHAPTER III

A DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

FROM that time on the chasm between them widened rapidly, Marian permitting herself a coldness toward him that even Roger's courtesy — which was of the alert and cheerful kind, unfailing in its chivalrous, Southern expression — found it difficult to ignore. The truth was, her disappointment with regard to the Sullivan dinner was twofold. She bitterly regretted the loss of what she considered an opportunity in the way of social prestige, as the event was one to which Rosalie Raymond's ready pen had lent a unique distinction, the amiable sarcasm of the brilliant, high-born girl, which now and then hit the mark a trifle too surely, especially when dealing with the parvenu, being something that Marian, had she been numbered among the guests, would have welcomed in this instance as an aid in the direction of a longed for personal conspicuousness. But she was most of all disturbed that she was frustrated in her desire to see again Francis Waller. Since that moment at the fair grounds when

THE INVISIBLE BOND

he had tossed her the rose from his buttonhole, he had haunted her thoughts persistently. His expression had both baffled and allured her. She could not begin to understand it, and there were times when the memory of it held her strangely captive, and she felt those greenish eyes of his upon her conquering her as by a mesmeric spell. She was eager to match her wits with his. But the chance was denied her. He left in a day or two, and the next she heard of him was that he was spending the autumn in New York.

She grew restless and moody, only fitfully interested in the life about her, at one time throwing herself with desperate abandon into whatever gaiety the place afforded, and almost running Roger into debt to gratify her whim for a number of new and costly gowns, at another disdaining everything and everybody while she spent her time out-stretched on the lounge in her bedroom, skimming the pages of a novel, or gazing idly out of the window. As October came on she formed a resolution. It was to go to Cincinnati once a week for voice culture and lessons in the theory of music. She had already studied considerably, under fairly good instruction, and formerly she had seriously contemplated the stage as a profession. She now thought of music as an outlet.

When the plan was proposed to Roger he had looked blank for an instant and seemed to hesitate.

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

As a matter of fact he did not at all see just how he was going to gratify her, as they were already living up to the last penny of their income, but he only said, with quickly attempted cheerfulness:

"I — I think I can accomplish it, Marian, if you want to go. When should you like to begin?"

"At once," she answered. "I shall go and return in the same day. I shall not mind the long journey; it will be much pleasanter than staying at home — and cheaper, after all, than entertaining. You know I told you that I thought of a series of small dinners. On the whole, I believe I prefer to study music; the life here begins to bore me."

And so weekly she made her pilgrimage, returning every Saturday evening a little pale and wearied, yet pleased at the praise she had received, for her voice was developing marvelously under the skilful training.

Music was indeed an excellent escape for the varied, pent-up emotions within her, which, since her marriage, had been steadily gaining in intensity, gathering toward some sort of outbreak, like hurrying clouds, her recent apparent quietude being but the lull before the storm. With amazing energy for one of her tropical, ease-loving temperament she gave herself up to the work assigned to her, her whole being pulsing and vibrating to the new impulse as a musical instrument whose chords have been sounded. Her

THE INVISIBLE BOND

listlessness seemed to fall from her through a kind of magical influence; and Roger, seeing the great change in her, and thankful beyond measure, went back again with a freer mind to his law books, and to that lonely life of the spirit in which she could have no share.

Francis Waller was almost forgotten. Sometimes, as she wandered aimlessly about the streets of Cincinnati, after her lessons were over, the possibility of an accidental meeting with him would suggest itself, startling her like an unexpected flashlight, and her heart would give a wild, exultant leap which sent the warm blood racing through her veins. She had not the smallest sense of shame for this excitability at the bare thought of him, not only because of a moral obtuseness that rendered her indifferent to many things that the finer order of woman seeks to shield herself from, but because of the realization of the utter hopelessness of her present situation with regard to him; so that she had come to look upon these rare reminders of him and her own feeling concerning them as something merely fanciful and romantic, the effect of which was like the thrill that sometimes came to her through her music, or when reading a particularly luminous paragraph. She wondered why she had so disturbed herself about him a short time previous, and was even a little amused with herself for having taken the loss of the Sullivan dinner so seriously.

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

Had she expected actually to meet him now her reflections possibly might have been different. But there seemed little probability of this. The papers reported him as deeply absorbed in a new piece of work, nearing completion, which was not to appear, however, before the following midsummer, the effort being pronounced by him as the greatest achievement he had thus far accomplished — a form of expression invariably employed by him in relation to his latest book. He was furthermore described as living very quietly in New York, where he had gone for the sake of the literary atmosphere, the monotony of his existence being unbroken save by an occasional opera, or dinner to his friends. He himself, it was said, seldom accepted an invitation.

Marian had just been reading some such notice with respect to him in a periodical containing a portrait and sketch of him. Half an hour before she had come from her singing-master, and she was still glowing under his approval. As she emerged from the long, tunnel-like passage leading out from the College of Music, she had stood a moment debating as to how she should spend the remaining two hours before train time. It was a dark November afternoon, and the Cincinnati streets were muddy. The city was even grayer and more cheerless than it ordinarily seemed to her, yet no outward aspect of things affected her

THE INVISIBLE BOND

greatly when her own affairs were running smoothly. She was to-day in excellent spirits, and she decided as she entered a car that she would spend part of the time in a book shop, among the magazines and the latest fiction. She would not walk much on account of the mud; besides she was a little tired. Ah, with what fervor had she sung that last thing! She could see that Gionnanni was well pleased, though as yet he was not quite willing to admit all that she would like to hear. Her mind was still full of his comment when she entered the book shop.

She had been there some time when suddenly it occurred to her that she had had no luncheon. With a smile at her own absorption she was turning away from the heaps of books and magazines of all kinds to which she had been giving a desultory attention when her glance fell upon a journal of literary criticism that thus far she had not seen. She picked it up and it opened at the sketch referred to.

"I will take this," she said to a clerk a moment afterward. "No; don't wrap it up, please." Then she paid for it and passed out.

Outside the fog had grown denser, and the tall buildings muffled in an icy mist gave to the scene a somberness that was both chilling and oppressive. It was but little more than two o'clock, yet one would have said that it was nearer five. Electric lights

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

blazed in most of the shop windows, and Marian glanced aside from time to time when the display within attracted her. Despite the dreariness of the weather the streets were crowded. Men and women of all grades passed and repassed in a continual counter current, until the eye became wearied and surveyed the throng as a mere aggregate, its characteristic features being lost sight of. Yet it was most distinctive; and save for an occasional soft Southern accent that now and then fell upon her ears she would have felt herself as far removed from Kentucky as if transplanted across the continent, the line of separation made by the Ohio River being far wider than the historic stream might reasonably suggest.

She was hurrying along, clutching with one hand her music case and the magazine she had just bought, and with the other her umbrella, when, quite suddenly, out of the crowd of unknown persons approaching, a face stood out with startling clearness, a man's face, one instant seen and then lost again in the moving mass of humanity.

She gave a short gasp and went pale, at the same moment throwing a quick, desperate glance around like that of some wild thing entrapped and seeking flight. She stood stock still for an instant, and then involuntarily drew back into the shadow of a building.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

The crowd parted slightly again, and she had reassurance that her eyes had not deceived her.

The man was coming nearer, although not hastening his steps, being wholly unconscious of her proximity. He was notably well dressed, his clothing, however, being elegantly unobtrusive, and he was walking with that air of half-insolent self-absorption and aloofness with which the individual of inferior order of genius often seeks to augment his importance. Now and then a head in the crowd was turned for another glance at the distinguished personage, whose rapt expression gave token of safety from detection. As he came into full view Marian stepped down from her hiding place.

"How do you do, Mr. Waller?" she said.

The great author wheeled briskly, and his greenish eyes flashed a look of surprised inquiry in the direction whence the voice had proceeded. Then he caught sight of Marian. His thin skin flushed sensitively as he hurried forward.

"Ah, this is as delightful as it is unexpected!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand. His gaze searched her face curiously, and he was smiling, a peculiar, flattering, cynical look that was at the same time reserved and insinuating showing on his features. "What brings you to Cincinnati, may I ask?"

She dropped her eyes as in sudden shyness. Her

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

heart was pounding heavily and a delicate pink was in her cheeks. Her whole being was thrillingly alive to him, and he knew it. "I am on business bent," she answered at last. "I come here every Saturday — for lessons in music, I hasten to explain, for fear, from the appearance of this, you might mistake me for a magazine agent."

She glanced down at her music case, and his eyes following the movement fell upon the literary journal containing the portrait and sketch of himself. He recognized it instantly, and a quick gleam shot from beneath his lowered lashes, but he made no comment. It was, however, a delicious sop to his vanity, this silent expression of her interest and tribute to his distinction.

"You have never told me what you think of that last book of mine," he gently chided, his expression becoming more admiring and less whimsical. The truth was there was no surer road to his respectful notice than by way of a sympathetic appreciation of his books. Even praise the most fatuous, if sufficiently eulogistic, was always cordially welcomed by him and received with the gravity of one who took himself far too seriously ever to suspect that it might be in any degree fulsome. Adverse criticism threw him into a rage, which, having exhausted its fury, was apt to simmer down into a melancholy, plaintive sort of

THE INVISIBLE BOND

brooding that ultimately took on form and an exquisite beauty of expression, being finally given to the world in the wail of the misunderstood. Marian's adoring attitude toward his genius, her genuine liking for the artificiality of the romanticist point of view, which the unsoundness of her own nature rendered peculiarly appealing, her delight in his glowing, Rossetti-like phrases and warm sensuousness of tone caused her to take on a value in his eyes which otherwise it would have been impossible for her to attain.

"Aren't you going to tell me?" he insisted, feeling no hesitation in introducing the topic at once as paramount.

She was still silent, and he darted a quick, suspicious glance at her.

"Ah, you didn't like it!" he said, withdrawing from her instantly, and with a gesture that was both deprecating and offended.

She raised her eyes to his. For a moment she met his gaze with something of her old effrontery and dashing irresponsibility, but she could not quite carry it off. Some strange power in the man seemed to subdue and humble her. The panther in her was conquered as in the presence of a keeper.

"I did like it," she responded, looking away. "I thought it — I think it, I should say, for I almost know it by heart — beautiful, most beautiful."

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

"And yet you didn't want to tell me so?"

His tone was very patient and encouraging. Once more he was beaming upon her.

"I wanted to, but I couldn't," she answered, slowly.

"But why?"

"For one thing, I thought it would take too long; I didn't know that I could say it quite so concisely."

"You said it gloriously!" he replied. He pulled out his watch, and deliberated.

"Have you had luncheon?" he inquired.

"No — not yet."

"Good! Then you will come and join me. We are just in a block of the St. Nicholas, and there will be abundance of time; your train does not leave until four."

She hesitated.

"Please come," he begged. "Think how dreary life must be for a man who seldom sits down to a table with a face opposite him, and be merciful. Let me know for once just how it would feel to look up and meet those eyes of yours in the delightfully intimate companionship of a luncheon table. By the way, they are very lovely eyes. Do you know it?"

She laughed, and glowed a little, and consented. As they went along he told her of the sister upon whom he had lavished the affection of his boyhood — "that purest flame," he called it, "that may never again burn

THE INVISIBLE BOND

so brightly." He spoke touchingly of the awful grief that had swept over him at the time of her marriage, and of his great desolation after she had left him. It was a favorite theme. It seldom failed to evoke feminine compassion, and feminine compassion was something that he would have found it quite impossible to exist without, the rôle of the unfortunate, the lonely, the sad, being one that he frequently resorted to.

Marian, though not by nature sympathetic, was duly impressed. Her ordinarily keen judgment, which was far from inclining her toward the sentimental view, for once had completely failed her. Her attitude was all that he could have wished for. There was a sort of suppressed excitement about her which was most flattering. He was usually disposed to be somewhat critical with regard to womankind, his taste being the most fastidious, but as he ushered her into the hotel, he forbore to look beyond her ripe beauty to any of the flaws which his own sensitivity was apt to make him acutely alive to. Her lack of breeding seemed to him to be atoned for by her cleverness and her vivid, florid style, which in itself was an intoxication. He thought her wondrously beautiful, altogether the most gorgeous tropical flower he had seen for many a day.

They found a table near one of the windows, and Marian, with a delicious sense of luxury stealing over her, leaned back in her chair while he gave his order

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

in a low tone to the waiter. She looked idly about the room as she slowly drew off her gloves. It was comfortably filled, and there was a subdued hum of voices. The softened lights, the dainty service, the cheerful camaraderie, were a pleasant contrast to the dreary, darkening streets. Everything was quiet, well-ordered, elegant, agreeable to the senses. Some very polished looking people were lunching at the table next to theirs, evidently a mother and her two daughters. She noticed that they all three looked up and spoke as Francis Waller passed them, the mother with extreme graciousness, and the girls, who were very young and shy, with a sort of blushing self-consciousness that revealed their respect for the august presence in their neighborhood.

He ordered an elaborate menu, with several kinds of wine. He was fond of good living, a fact to which his increasing avoirdupois bore painful witness, and he was, furthermore, eager to show a special courtesy. Marian had pleased him.

She was well aware of it. Already the thought had warmed her through and through. More stimulating than the wines he offered, the realization had sent a wild thrill through her, made poignant by despair. Had she met him thus but one little year earlier, how different, she thought bitterly, would her fate have been!

THE INVISIBLE BOND

The repast proceeded slowly, elegantly, with a due regard for gastronomic enjoyment, and with a certain light and evanescent banter more frothy than whipped cream, more sparkling than champagne. The room was nearly empty now. The gracious matron and the two young girls had gone. They were practically alone when he leaned toward her with a complete change of tone. They had talked of his books, of his travels, of himself, but not once had he made even an indirect reference to her marriage, or to another topic which throughout had been intruding upon her thoughts like a child tugging at her skirts. Could it be that he had actually forgotten?

"Were you altogether sure," he asked, looking her full in the eyes, "that I did not know you when I met you that day more than a year ago?"

She started. "What day do you mean?" she said, quickly, fingering her wine-glass.

He gave a short laugh. "Must I be more explicit? Or did the incident make too little impression to be remembered? Perhaps it will refresh your memory to say that you were driving with — with Mr. Bolling, and you met me taking a stroll not far from the Sullivan mansion. It was just a few months before your marriage. Has the occurrence escaped your recollection?"

"No."

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

He leaned his arms upon the table and bent forward. He was still smiling, and his eyes, half closed, were riveted upon her; a gleam like the flash from an emerald darted from beneath his lowered lids.

"Were you sure?" he repeated.

"I was quite sure."

"Then you did not attribute to me a fine bit of acting in order to spare the situation?"

"I knew that it was not acting."

He threw back his head and laughed softly. "You were right," he answered, presently, very slowly, still watching her with that same intent, partly cynical, partly flattering gaze, "you were right; it was not pretense. I was sincerely puzzled."

"I knew that you were."

"Shall I tell you the reason?"

She glanced toward him and, instantly withdrawing her eyes, bowed faintly.

"You give me permission?" His manner was insinuating, intimate, the expression of infinite subtleties and finer shades of meaning too delicate to be translated.

She waited, breathing quickly, her whole being glowing and palpitating in his presence. Her lips were parted, and her face was turned to his like a sunflower toward its god. She was silent and he went on quickly, warming to her allurements. His voice dropped to a whisper.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"It was because I was bewildered, dazzled, drunken at the first draught: your beauty was too strong for me; it was some marvelous mixture in a golden chalice such as one of the old vikings might have quaffed on returning from his plunderings; it was soft and undulating as a sun-kissed wave when it encircles the hardy swimmer; it was enchantment, it was rapture, it —"

He stopped short and caught in his breath, surprised at his own vehemence. He was not accustomed to make love so violently, if indeed it could be said of him that he made love at all. His tactics with women, married or unmarried, as a rule were most discreet. He was well aware that what he had said was almost a burlesque; yet, such was his capacity of simulating an emotion he had never experienced, the thing feigned at once took on reality. It was not difficult now to persuade himself that the momentary pleasure he had felt at sight of a beautiful woman had meant to him all that he had described; his own words had completely captivated him.

"But you had my photograph," she said, entranced.

He shook his head sadly, as if meaning to imply unutterable things. He sat twirling his glass meditatively.

"True; I had your photograph," he replied, at length, "but no photographer could adequately give you. I had not dreamed that you were half so lovely."

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

She put up her hand and smoothed a stray lock beneath her hat.

"Still it might have been sufficient to prove my identity, I should think," she responded, coquettishly, "that is, if you were at all familiar with it."

He flushed a little guiltily, knowing that he would have been sadly straitened if called upon to produce the photograph referred to. But she went on, her manner becoming all at once embarrassed and shame-faced.

"And you had — you had my letters," she said in a low voice, dropping her eyes and crimsoning painfully.

He turned quickly, some instinct of gentlemanly feeling making him prompt to rescue her from her own mortification.

"Ah, yes — those letters!" he responded, softly, in a tone of tender, impassioned melancholy.

"They should have helped you to recognize me."

"They should — they should!" he cried, plaintively and humbly.

The return of the waiter at this moment was most opportune. Though the subject was one that must have inevitably obtruded itself, having furthermore been almost invited by him, he was eager to be done with it, fearing at any instant that it would lead him into realms where it were safer not to wander. As a matter of fact his recollections with respect to the letters

THE INVISIBLE BOND

were only a little less hazy than were those in relation to the photograph. He only recalled them as the fervid, almost immodest outpourings of a woman whom he had not sought and had never even seen, which several years before had been most lavishly bestowed upon him. He was, however, in the habit of receiving many such effusions. He was the type of man that women as a rule are apt to care for and men not unfrequently to abhor, though he was capable of charming both on occasions. The revelation of himself through his books had brought him an immense circle of feminine acquaintances into whose faces he had never looked, but who, nevertheless, were not content to remain strangers to him. At first he had kept many of the letters that were thus sent to him, the adoration that they breathed often offering a healing balm to wounds inflicted by less gentle critics. Gradually, however, he had ceased to do this, not only because they had increased in number, with the publication of each new volume, to such an extent as actually to become a burden, but for the reason that their oil and wine no longer soothed: it was too frequently conveyed to him through the medium of inferior English. *Le mot juste* was as much to him as it was to Flaubert.

As for the letters sent him by Marian Day, he vaguely remembered that they had impressed him as being slightly above the average in composition, but by no

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

means possessing the literary quality. Their momentary attraction for him had been due to the intensity of passionate feeling they expressed, the reckless abandon with which the author yielded herself up to his art and to himself. There were just ten of them in all. The first was sent anonymously, but in such a manner as to make it possible for him to reply to it. He did reply to it, quoting to himself with a whimsical smile these words: "Women want to be deceived, they force you to it, and if you resist, they blame you."

But soon the correspondence bored him and he let it come to naught, her last letters being allowed to remain unanswered. Yet something of the writer's potent personality had throbbed through her imperfect expression, and he had never quite forgotten her. He believed her to be very much in love with him. Most of them he thought were more or less fascinated, but they lacked her power, her superb surrender. It had hurt him a little to treat her so shabbily, and he had pictured to himself the maddening humiliation he had inflicted, with a sort of quiet contemplation that was both pitiful and sardonic. Once or twice afterwards he had even thought of taking up the matter again, not as a lover, but as a man and a gentleman, and with the intention merely of removing forever from her mind the impression he had wrongfully conveyed. Before himself he posed always as a good man. It

THE INVISIBLE BOND

was impossible that he should ever stoop to selfishness or unkindness; and it seemed to him very noble and high-minded that he should be disturbing himself about an acquaintance of this kind, solely because he might have misled her into the belief that he was really interested in her in the way that she desired. He had been interested, but only to the extent of allowing himself to be worshiped. It is a romanticist's way.

The waiter had just deposited the last course. As soon as he had retired Francis Waller pulled out his watch. "This has been very delightful," he exclaimed, "and I thank you warmly, but I mustn't keep you here long enough to make you miss your train, else Roger will be holding me accountable."

He looked somewhat ruefully at his frozen pudding. There was still time enough, but he would have preferred not to feel hurried — that is, he would have so felt had he not been a little anxious. He feared a return to the subject of the letters, and he would have been willing even to forego a favorite dainty rather than have another reference to it. But in his nervous suggestion as to the hour he had not sufficiently reckoned upon Marian's intrepidity.

She toyed an instant with the rich confection before her, then she raised her eyes and looked him squarely in the face.

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

"If the letters were so much to you — as much as you imply — why did you not respond to the last two I sent you?"

He flinched, but recovered himself quickly. He did not reply at once.

"Ah, but there was a reason," he said, slowly and sorrowfully, looking down at his plate.

Her eyes were glued to his face. There had been a little catch in her voice when she spoke again, and her cheeks were scarlet. His sensitive ear detected the quivering note of appeal, the secret clutching after a hope too long deferred, the pitiful effort to reestablish herself and win back what had seemed to be lost. He rose heroically to the occasion.

"There was a reason," he repeated, and then closed his lips decisively, as if that reason were one that they must on no account inquire into.

"I should like you to tell me what it was," she insisted.

He looked up. "Must I — dare I?" he asked hurriedly.

She leaned toward him and he could hear her breath coming torn and in little gasps. She was smiling softly, and her whole being was a persuasion.

"Yes!" she whispered, "yes!"

He sank back in his chair and his gaze wandered to the window.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Dear lady," he said, presently, "you must already know that there could never be but one reason why any man would not respond to you. It is an old, old expedient, the shift of silence, and men in all ages have resorted to it, when circumstances and inclination clashed. You will never know just what it cost me not to reply to those letters."

He was not deliberately deceiving; far from it; on the contrary, he was seldom sincerer in his life. He had simply worked himself up into a mood, a passion of exalted, tender feeling and patient renunciation, and at the moment he meant and believed every word he said. However, if he had but written it all to her he would have done far better; he was readier with the pen than with the tongue. But before she could answer he went on again quickly:

"Ah," he said, sadly, "how impossible is it that you should understand! you who have never done anything in the way of creative work, how can you even dimly comprehend the awful hold that art takes upon the man who hears within his own soul the voice of a far-off greatness—a greatness it may be in himself or others to whom 'God whispers'? Yet always he hears it, calling to him, commanding him to rise up and go forth like Abraham into the unknown, to leave the darkness of idolatry, of materialism, for the pure light of reason, the lofty dreams of the spirit. Though I

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

dared not answer, I trust that much, much that I would have said to you if I could was in the little book I sent to you."

Marian rose, snatching up her gloves. She did not meet his glance, and she only said, gravely:

"I think I should prefer a less indirect method of expression. Now we must hurry, hurry, else I shall miss my train."

But he knew that he had made his peace with her by the radiance that suddenly overspread her features and the look of triumph that lingered in her eyes.

It was eleven o'clock of the same evening, and Francis Waller was sitting in the glow of his library fire smoking a cigar. The great stone structure in the suburbs of Cincinnati, somber, imposing, beautiful, with its parklike enclosure of evergreen and forest trees, its stately furnishings, works of art, and bric-à-brac, had been opened temporarily, in order that the distinguished author might here finish the closing scenes of his latest romance. The work of the day had been somewhat interrupted by his meeting with Marian, and since dinner he had been going over the pages written in the forenoon with a scholarly and painstaking exactness, eliminating a sentence now and again where the thought seemed crowded, adding one where it seemed curtailed, and lending to the

THE INVISIBLE BOND

whole those exquisite final touches that only the artist born knows how to bestow, and that ever gave to his work that delicate luminosity which constituted its special elegance and charm of style.

He was now feeling a trifle wearied, and he had drawn a comfortable chair up in front of the blazing wood fire and was endeavoring to give himself up wholly to the Dream — a sort of luxurious, fantastic state of mind partly induced by opiates in which his thoughts took wing and floated like phantoms in an ethereal realm, the lovely ghosts of desires never quite real enough to take on distinctive form. Here also the noblest impulses of his soul — and he too had his noble impulses, who of us has not? — wandered stillborn or abortive, wailing for the consummation that was denied them through their own inherent lack of strength. Like many of his predecessors of his own peculiar order of temperament, the Coleridges, the Shelleys, the Poes, the Rossettis of the world — those intensely sensitive, suffering souls to whom he was a brother — he shrank from the mere pressure of life at times with a vehemence that indicated acute torture; and like them he felt driven on occasions to resort to the unwholesome, factitious aid of anodynes that temporarily gratified and soothed, only to leave behind an increase of nervous irritability in their after effects that drove him well-nigh to distraction.

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

Of the many soft, entrancing visions, thus conjured, that he was able to bring before him in heightened attractiveness, one stood out separate and flawless, clothed in the ideality of a poet's fancy and tenderly beautiful. This it was that took precedence over all others, excepting his dream of fame. Nightly at this hour it came drifting down to him out of a white cloud-land tipped with gold, and he saw her glorious and resplendent. For the Dream then took on the image of a woman, and that woman was Sibyl Fontaine.

It was this devotion to something afar from the sphere of his sorrow that gave to his existence just that fine rounding and completing that seemed to him to render him greater both as an artist and as a man. She had been distinctly a selection before he had ever loved her; and in finally exalting her to the supreme place over all other women in his thoughts, he was by no means unmindful of the honor he conferred. The fact that less with her than with any other woman of his acquaintance he was justified in the assumption that ultimately he should be successful only stimulated rather than deterred. Others, like overhanging fruit, had dropped too easily into his grasp; she was the perfect peach upon the topmost bough, and only the dauntless could hope to reach her. She would not be quickly won. One must strive for her, and wait

THE INVISIBLE BOND

for her, and deserve her, he well knew. Her pride was exquisite to him. How magnificent to see it bend to him, as the peach to the daring climber!

Some day he believed that it would bend to him. In the meantime he was in no great haste to wear the shackles of matrimony. Her piquant cleverness would only become more charming as the years went by, being tempered by an increase of sympathy as life should reveal to her its inmost meaning; and the thirteen years or more between them would gradually narrow if opportunity were given her to develop her mental powers. Although he had already made known to her his intentions toward her, he meant to give her that opportunity, being urged to the effort to win her more securely by few of the impulses that drive men headlong into marriage. It is true that he loved her; but it was in his own way, and that way was of the silent, brooding kind that offered tribute to her more in the fashion of a poet than of a lover. The simple, straightforward human homage of the man who seeks to bind to himself by every possible tie the woman he loves that he may possess her wholly, was a thing unknown to him. Yet the one thing on earth, aside from his art, that could rouse him to the very center of his being was the dread, the actual terror, that sometimes came over him that he might lose her. The thought of it was a madness.

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

And it was this perhaps more than any other feeling that in the main kept him true to her. For his loyalty to her seemed to make her his.

But to-night he was disturbed by other things.

On the whole he regarded the experience of the afternoon a blunder, just as the correspondence with Marian had also been a blunder, though at the outset the affair had not been of his own seeking. It had left his nerves considerably jarred; and, as a result of the realization that he had gone further than he should have gone with a married woman for whom he cared not a penny, he was in that state of irritability out of which even the thought of Sibyl could not charm him, for the reason that it hurt him now even to think of her at all. It was not the wrong of the thing that troubled him; it was his disgust that the imperfect should offer him appeal.

Nevertheless, Marian had attracted him strangely. As his thoughts dwelt upon her, sorely against his will, to the exclusion of Sibyl, she seemed like some glittering, beautiful serpent that had suddenly trailed across his path, fascinating him and holding him spellbound. All at once Roger Bolling's face came before him. He rose and began to move up and down the room, some sense of moral obligation as between man and man waking and stirring.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Conscience, or the thing within him that stood for conscience, though ordinarily dormant, was making him decidedly uncomfortable. Despite the warmth, the luxury, the beauty all about him, he felt forlorn and wretched. He began to grow angry, just as if all the world had turned against him.

Once he went over and stood before the fire, looking down into the writhing flames. Then he kicked the logs impatiently, and turning away began his slow march up and down the room again, with his hands clasped behind him, his eyes on the floor.

It was long past midnight before he flung himself down into his chair, wearied, more miserable than he had been for many a day, and in that overwrought, embittered frame of mind which often possessed him for no more obvious reason than the present one, and which now almost invariably sent him to the drug that was fast gaining a hold upon him.

To-night he was in no mood for even a show of resistance; the Dream had failed to bring him the solace it so often did when tired from a hard day's work, or when badgered by the critics; Sibyl also had turned against him.

He sat for a few moments looking deeply into the fire. The old reckless disregard of consequences, the dare-devil spirit that rendered him savagely defiant of the future, thirstingly alive to the present, began to

DREAMER OF GOLDEN DREAMS

steal over him, paralyzing his will. Suddenly with a low, demoniac sort of laughter he threw out his arms: he had given up the struggle. Then he rose and went back to his morphine, saying, as did Coleridge of his laudanum, "This is my best friend."

CHAPTER IV

THE FLIGHT

“Do you — think — we can make it?”

The words came haltingly and in a smothered whisper, as Marian turned her face quickly but without checking her pace. There was something like a sob of terror in her voice.

Francis Waller did not reply for an instant. The rapid gait at which they were proceeding was not conducive to conversation and he was almost out of breath.

“It is just barely possible,” he said, at last, not unmindful of his dignity.

Marian clutched his arm more wildly, and dragged him onward.

“Then faster — faster — oh, you must get me there!”

He gave a troubled glance around, but no carriage was in sight, and their car had hurried past as they issued from the restaurant. It was eight o'clock of a raw wintry night just before Christmas, and the Cincinnati streets were thronged. Marian had remained

THE FLIGHT

over for the afternoon performance of a light opera she wished to hear, and afterwards she and Waller had dined at a new place which he had been eager to make her acquainted with. It was not so well known as the St. Nicholas, and for that reason he preferred it as less likely to render them conspicuous. He was beginning to feel self-conscious. Since that first accidental meeting of six or seven weeks before she had haunted his thoughts persistently, his feeling toward her being an intricacy of emotions difficult to disentangle, like offshoots from a vine. The parent root, however, was to be found in an extreme of vanity which she, more than any other woman of his acquaintance, knew how successfully to pander to. Sibyl Fontaine had never flattered him. Though in many respects she had seemed greatly to admire his work, he had never felt quite satisfied with her attitude toward it, or toward himself; she was altogether too cheerfully aloof from that little sentimental note of tenderly persuasive melancholy that pervaded everything of his, and that with his feminine audience as a rule was most effective. She was wholly an optimist, albeit the most poetic-minded woman he knew, as well as the most cultured. It would have pleased him had she desired to take her place among the lowliest of his worshipers; and had she done this, he on his part would have gladly reached down and crowned her the queen of them all.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

The picture thus presented was most agreeable to him.

But Sibyl's natural piquancy and healthfulness of disposition had safely rescued her from all such abasement; and there were times when the serenity of her self-poise, though it really sounded the keynote of his profound respect for her, provoked him to an antagonism through the mere thought of it that sent him after a totally different order of woman, while still desiring her above all others.

Marian had offered the sharpest contrast possible to the delicate-minded girl of his dreams; and to Marian he had turned in a spirit of contrariety and of wounded self-love, after Sibyl's failure to take the smallest notice of his latest literary venture. She had ceased to be for him the wife of another man, and that man one whom he had called his friend; she was merely a woman who adored him, and on whom he was beginning to lean for a sort of sympathy that he believed to be as essential to his mental existence as food to the body. He had spent a part of every day with her that she had been in Cincinnati, their meetings taking on a certain clandestine accent that to his taste was revolting, but that to hers, due perhaps to some secret wantonness of the blood, only added flavor.

This evening they had been more than ever absorbed in each other, and the time had flown. Once indeed

THE FLIGHT

he had taken out his watch and glanced casually at the hands. They pointed to twenty minutes after seven. He did not know that his watch had stopped, owing to his failure to wind it the day before when in one of those abstracted states of mind that he was prone to.

They had talked on and on, forgetful of the passing moments, when Marian had suddenly looked down at the little jeweled timepiece that Roger had given her which she wore on the outside of her maroon-colored silk shirt waist. Her face went pale.

"Horrors!" she exclaimed, jumping up and gathering her belongings frantically together. "It is nearly eight. What on earth shall I do? I shall miss my train."

He pulled out his watch, stared at it, held it to his ear, and then sprang to his feet, at the same moment motioning to the waiter. He turned to Marian. "We shall have to run for it," he said in a low voice.

An instant afterward he had thrust a sum of money into the out-stretched hand of the attendant that fairly set the head of that functionary a-whirling, and muttering, "I haven't time to wait for the change," he snatched up his hat and Marian's music case, flung his overcoat over his arm, and made a dash for the doorway, whither Marian had already preceded him.

As the first keen blast of the icy outer air, heightened by contrast with the heated atmosphere of the room he

THE INVISIBLE BOND

had just left, smote him full in the face, he drew back as from an uplifted hand raining quick blows upon him, and struggled into his overcoat. His heart was pounding heavily. A strange, terrible feeling was beginning to creep over him. His throat felt dry and parched. There was a steady tramp of footsteps past the door, but he looked down at the ground, avoiding the glance of the moving multitude like a culprit. Marian was already far ahead, fleeing with the swiftness of the wind, and as if from an impending danger. He could see her shadow reflected in the brilliantly lighted street now and then when the crowd parted.

He stood a moment deliberating, and in that instant he lost sight of her completely. Once he lifted his eyes as a car going in the opposite direction from the station passed, and made a movement toward it. But he checked the impulse to hail it. A sudden dogged look had crept into his eyes. He waited an instant longer and a gleam of recklessness and defiance shot from under his half-closed lids. Then he turned and sped after her.

When he had overtaken her he offered her his arm and she took it without a word. They hurried on not glancing to right or left. He had the collar of his overcoat turned up and he had drawn on his gloves, but her fur hung loose and her jacket was unfastened. Her hand against his arm seemed white and cold as

THE FLIGHT

marble. She was panting, and her face when he now and then looked into it as they passed beneath the glare of an electric light startled him by its aspect. He was wondering with a throb of selfish anxiety if she were not going to faint, when she raised her eyes to his and made the eager inquiry to which he had been able to give only a discouraging response.

Some desperate and powerful contention seemed to be stirring within her — something that made her both shrink from him and cling to him. She kept her face averted as if loath to meet his eyes, and he could feel, communicating itself to him like a shock from an electric battery, the sudden sharp quivering that swept through her from time to time as she drew back from him and almost dropped his arm. But her hot breath when she whispered to him fluttered against his cheek like a caress.

He bent down his head to her. "Are you very tired?"

"No."

"Aren't we walking too fast for you?"

"No — no; we must hurry."

"I am quite sure that we cannot reach the station in time, and the exertion may make you ill."

She laughed. "I am such a fragile creature!" Then she added with that same half-terrified recoil from him that he had already noticed, "it — it is not the exertion."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

He did not answer for a moment, but his face was as white as hers as he bent toward her again, and his heart was beating wildly. "You are frightened?" he asked low under his breath.

"Yes." The monosyllable fell from her lips in a kind of mingled challenge and appeal.

"But we are nearly there now."

"We may be too late."

"And then —?"

She gave a short, stifled cry and broke away from him, quickening her steps. A carriage bowled by containing two people muffled in evening wraps, a middle-aged woman and a young girl. As the vehicle passed, an electric light shone full upon its occupants, and Waller recognized them. They were the mother and the elder of the two daughters who had sat at the lunch table next to him and Marian at the St. Nicholas weeks before.

He drew back quickly into the shadow, not wishing to be seen by them with Marian, partly through a sense of guilt that he had always when with her, and that made him wish to avoid observation, and partly because of an innately snobbish feeling that inclined him to attach an undue valuation to the opinion of these two particular persons, for no other reason save that they happened to be important in the social world in which he moved. He seemed to know in-

THE FLIGHT

tuitively that Marian was not the sort of person they would admire. He was not a gentleman in the sense that Roger Bolling was a gentleman.

However, his embarrassment was short-lived. The carriage disappeared, and once more the tremendous power of the woman, rendered far more persuasive by her genuine, momentary reluctance, reasserted itself, dominating him completely. All sense of personal responsibility was slipping away from him: nature in that instant appeared supreme, and life became purposeless, rudderless.

They had reached the station. He stood aside for her to enter, and then they both rushed headlong down below into the long cavernous enclosure whence the trains go forth. An ominous stillness pervaded the place. It was dismal and shadowy, the remote corners being rendered particularly somber by contrast with the lighted spaces here and there. It was quite deserted. In the distance a cloud of smoke trailed above the track, and a steady, rumbling sound fell upon the ear. The man at the gates was turning away. Waller hastened up to him.

"What train was that that just went out?" he demanded.

"Q and C special," answered the man, laconically, as he moved past.

Waller and Marian stood perfectly still.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

The man suddenly paused and threw them an indifferent glance over his shoulder.

"Wuz you aimin' to go on that train?"

Waller nodded.

"Just missed it, mister; there she goes now," responded the man, cheerfully, as he disappeared within a doorway.

The two still stood motionless. Neither spoke.

At length Marian moved away a step or two. "I must send a telegram," she said, without meeting his eyes.

"Yes," he replied, shortly.

They went slowly up the flight of steps leading into the general waiting-room, and he went for some telegraph blanks.

"Have you — have you any relatives or friends living in Cincinnati?" he asked when he returned. He was conscious that he was putting the question to her as a mere form, and that he was but toying with his destiny, which, fixed and resolute, would not alter now for the sake of an evasion.

She sat down on one of the long wooden benches with their many chair-shaped divisions that stretched across the room, and put the pad he had brought her on her knee.

"I have no relatives here," she answered in a very low voice. "I had a friend — she left to-day."

THE FLIGHT

Then she wrote: "Missed my train. Am with Minnie Werner."

It was addressed to Roger Bolling, and the words were barely legible, her hand was trembling so. She held the slip of paper up for Waller to read.

"Who is this person?" he asked, glancing quickly at her.

"My friend who left to-day."

He rose and crossed the room, handing the message to the clerk at a desk at the far end. Then he returned to her.

"I was expecting my sister from New York to be with me this evening," he said, "and the servants at my home were duly notified. I forgot to inform them, however, of her change of plans disclosed in a letter received from her at noon. She has not been here for many years, and no one now living with me has ever seen her. I will find a special feast prepared in her honor and everything in readiness."

He spoke in a quiet, entirely matter-of-fact tone, with his eyes on the loud-ticking clock high up on the wall opposite.

She was sitting with her hands tightly clasped in her lap and her head bowed.

She grew a shade whiter, but she did not move nor speak.

He gave a quick glance around; then he bent over her,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

his face wild and haggard. "I think I can make you entirely comfortable," he said.

She struggled to her feet. There was a moment's uncertainty, and he watched her narrowly. The room seemed to swim before her and she reached back and grasped the round of the bench as if to steady herself. There was a sound in her ears as of a great bell deeply tolling the death-knell of all that she was about to renounce. The moral law within her, though usually a voice that was barely audible and seldom regarded, was clamoring now, but more as a solemn affirmation than as a warning. It was too late for admonition; too late to retreat. With a woman of her temperament the final result had been foreshadowed in the first yielding. Afterwards she was as powerless against the storm of feeling that bore down upon her as a mere shanty in the sweep of a tornado. Her doom had been already pronounced. She could see nothing left her but to accept it; and in thus yielding herself up to it there came a moment of lull followed by a thrill of desperate, ecstatic joy in which the last murmuring of conscience was forever silenced.

She slowly turned and raised her eyes to his; and as she did so there came a warm surge of crimson into her cheeks, and with it a sudden rekindling and mighty stirring of all her powers that transformed her strangely, and lent a wild energy to the delirium that was driving

THE FLIGHT

them both headlong like the mad impulse given a forest-fire by a swift, onrushing wind. She was superb in the might of her decision and in the completeness of her surrender; and under the tremendous sweep of the passions that swayed her she seemed for the instant to be lifted out of the sphere of vulgar, or merely commonplace, evil, and to take on a certain largeness of attitude and of proportions that made her seem a being of terrible, almost unearthly strength and beauty, a goddess deigning to bestow herself upon mortal man.

He saw the change in her and his brain reeled. Quick as a flash of lightning, response leaped from his eyes to hers. He made an involuntary movement toward her, bent down his head and spoke a few short, unsteady, half-inarticulate words in her ear. He stood a moment. Then he turned, and without replying she followed him out of the close, brilliantly lighted building into the chill and darkness of the street.

It was beginning to snow, and the icy flakes shot like well-aimed pebbles into her face, clung to her garments, and glistened jewel-like on her long fur boa. She dashed them off with an odd laugh, and stood aside while he went to call a carriage, her eyes, gleaming like oriental stars, following his every movement, and finally riveted upon the dark figure, as he hurried back to her, in an intensity of unbridled feeling that urged him onward and ever onward to the very brink of the

THE INVISIBLE BOND

precipice whereon she waited with eager, out-stretched arms.

His manner had lost its customary deliberateness. He was desperately agitated. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face, furrowed, stern, even forbidding in its pallor, was kept resolutely from her, as if he mistrusted even the small grasp upon himself he still retained and dared not meet her gaze. She felt the violent trembling of his arm against her own when he assisted her into the carriage, and as she leaned for a moment against him she knew that he was shaken to the very foundations of his being by the thing he was about to do.

Yet there was that in her audacity which appealed powerfully to his somewhat timorous disposition; and in the instant that he took his seat beside her she realized with a thrill of exultation that was deep and frenzied and diabolic in its unholy joy that the very climax of her sway over him had been reached when, obeying the imperious summons of a newly aroused emotion, he flung morality and convention to the winds, closed the carriage door upon them, and abandoned himself to all the consequences of his rash and fatal step.

Neither spoke as they were borne rapidly along through the crowded city streets. Now and then an electric light flashing full in their faces showed her the

THE FLIGHT

elegant, distinguished figure at her side muffled in the heavy overcoat dumb and motionless — otherwise she might readily have believed herself to be alone. He was gazing fixedly out of the carriage window, the one on his side, and she saw only imperfectly the clean cut of his auburn beard, the sensitive outline of his thoughtful, scholarly profile, her eye being caught and held by the glassy stare that gave immobility to his features.

But the meaning of his absorption was something she could define; and it was with a feeling half pitying and wholly undisturbed that she found herself following him into those gray regions of false philosophy wherein the romanticist, forsaking his realm of ether, becomes the rankest of realists and, in his desire for self-justification and in his despondency, shrieks a bitter protest against restriction, and clamors for nature's rights.

For her there had come not an instant of wavering. Her resolution once taken had been final and irrevocable. "Magnificent in sin," she stood conscienceless, deliberate, defiant, daring to look the thing straight in the face, invoking to her aid neither sophistry nor delusion, caring to appease neither God nor man, and seeking in the future they were thus darkly entering upon no protection for herself but the splendid armor of his love.

But if she were minded to play the part of Clytemnestra, that of Ægisthus was by no means to his liking;

THE INVISIBLE BOND

and one moment he was torn by a recognition of what his madness surely would cost him, another engulfed beneath the waves of passion that her yielding had called forth — passion that hitherto had been with him more a thing to dream of than to be actually indulged in, the melancholy of the unattainable being always preferable to the ennui that in his case inevitably followed upon fulfilment. Such a catastrophe as he had been drawn into would have seemed to him a year before wholly beyond the bounds of possibility. But the drug he was in the habit of taking had weakened his will and developed in him that tendency to skepticism which gave pronouncement to his attitude of life, an attitude of rebellion wherein the more discerning saw ever foreshadowed in the philosopher and the moralist the cynic and the sensualist — whatever contradiction his writings or his mode of conduct might show.

A dread of the scorn of his fellow-beings, before whom he had posed always as a respecter of law, rather than any profound sense of outrage against the social structure, which, to the extent of his act, he was about to undermine, made the plunge he had just taken startlingly sobering. A cold perspiration stood out on his brow, and his face was hard and set.

Self-conscious by nature, the situation was one at which he revolted, without, however, any thought of

THE FLIGHT

escape. Clotho and Lachesis had spun a strange garment of his destiny, and Atropos belike was already approaching with her shears. What mattered it? Life had not been so sweet a thing to him that he should whine and cower at the thought of death. But he was too fond of his own ease, and of his own inclination, too impatient of any disturbance that intruded upon his art, not to feel an instinctive shrinking from the future before him — if there were to be any future. However, a bullet from Roger Bolling's revolver might end the business, he reflected, with a sort of grim humor, as he sat wrapped in a moody silence into which Marian's ready intuition forbade her to venture.

She leaned far back in the corner of the carriage, and closed her eyes. Now and then a slow smile played about her lips; otherwise her face was white and still as a statue's. But though she was aware of much of which he was thinking, it caused her no alarm that even in these first moments of bestowment he should appear strangely lacking in tenderness and thoughtfulness toward her. Genius, it seemed to her, was not to be tried by ordinary human standards; and the proof of his love for her was in his presence by her side. Her faith in herself had been given a new and powerful stimulus, and under the intoxicant of his capitulation, she fancied that she knew him through and through, and had little dread that his present

THE INVISIBLE BOND

mood would not pass. There was something soothing in the steady roll of the vehicle, and she kept her eyes closed for a long time.

When she opened them again they were quite out in the suburbs, and she was conscious of a calm white light over everything, and a sense of nearing their destination. A heavy snow lay on the ground, and it gave a weird distinctness to the objects they passed. Some of the homes were stately and beautiful, and she felt the little envious pang that always came to her at the sight of luxury.

All at once her heart gave a wild, exultant leap, and she turned and looked steadily at Waller. At the same instant the carriage paused, and there was a brief waiting, and they turned into a wide gateway and were borne noiselessly up a long avenue flanked with ghostly trees, in the direction of a great stone building from whose many windows lights twinkled like glow-worms in the darkness. Then the vehicle came to a standstill, and they got out, and Waller dismissed it.

The two stood alone on the snow-covered terrace. Like a phantom coach the carriage moved along the tortuous driveway and faded into the night, long white spectral arms seeming to clutch at it as it passed. There was a vast silence all about them, as if even nature waited breathless for the next act in their poor tragedy. It was not snowing now, and it had grown

THE FLIGHT

clearer and much colder. A full-orbed moon was just visible above the evergreens that stood on a little knoll to the rear of the building, and its light fell softly upon Marian's upturned face and gleamed upon her heavy twists of gold-brown hair. Her fur hung loose, as if she were unmindful of the cold, and her breath came hot and tumultuous.

Something that the moonlight brought out in her aspect, the sense of her utter aloneness, and of her abandonment to his mercy, the poetic stillness and crystal beauty of the winter night, stirred the heart of Waller to a sort of universal compassion, an extravagance of tenderness such as he frequently worked himself up into in composition, and which in this moment was startling even to himself in the effect it produced upon him.

For an instant his resolution was shaken. He looked quickly at her, drew back a step or two, muttering something under his breath she could not catch; and then, as she raised her astonished eyes to his, he broke into a torrent of rapid, incoherent speech from which she could gain little save that he was a man crazed, beside himself with conflicting emotion, and that he was offering her, even yet, the opportunity of retreat.

She stood staring dumbly at him, her expression wild and strained, her form motionless. Suddenly,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

without a word she turned and moved quickly away from him down the avenue.

He remained perfectly still. His face had grown haggard and desperate, the momentary softening of his features yielding to lines of age, and of fretfulness, and of a sort of dogged defiance that gave him the look of an animal at bay. And still the tall figure moved steadily onward, and still he did not stir.

All at once she turned and began to retrace her steps, walking slowly, humbly, with bowed head, like a queen dethroned. He started violently, awoke from his trance, and a look of cunning overspread his features as of pride in his own mastery. An instant afterward a sense of chivalry replaced the baser feeling, and then the storm of passion shook him, and the old reckless light leaped from his eyes as he rushed to meet her with out-stretched arms.

With a stifled cry she sank into them, and he strained her to him, smothering, blinding her with hard, fierce kisses. With his arm still about her they moved slowly along the terrace and up the flight of steps. Just before he touched the doorbell, again he bent down his head and kissed her, and a low laugh broke from her and rang out like a chime of silver bells upon the frosty air.

A moment afterward the door opened to his summons, and together they entered the brightly lighted hall.

CHAPTER V

A LETTER

It was seven o'clock of an evening five days later.

A few moments before, Roger had risen after a solitary dinner and had wandered into the library. Here a blithesome fire leaped on the hearth, and James had drawn the table up and brought the reading lamp, a great chair being placed with loving care beside it, and in precisely the position that would enable the light to fall most comfortably. Other men might not be heroes to their valets, but to James, Roger was always a prince whom it was a delight to serve. Tonight, a particularly inviting meal had been prepared as a solace to loneliness. But the young master had seemed little inclined to enjoy it, and the slim figure had soon risen from the table leaving the food almost untasted. However, if he would not eat, possibly he might read, and James, anticipating the contingency, had been, as usual, well prepared for it, though marveling much within himself that there should actually

THE INVISIBLE BOND

be a person so constituted as to display such benighted preference.

But Roger was scarcely more in the mood for a mental feast than for a material one. A number of books and magazines, and also several newspapers, lay on the table; and his glance rested upon these last with a vague sense of losing touch with current events, but he forbore to take one up. With a pre-occupation that seemed to render him an instant afterwards wholly oblivious of his surroundings, he had flung himself into the armchair before the fire, and sat leaning on his elbow, thinking hard.

Marian had completely baffled him. There had come two telegrams, to be sure, but the second was as coolly noncommittal as the first with reference to her return. He had expected her on the Monday previous and had gone twice to the train to meet her. On the day following he had also gone. It was now Thursday and there had come nothing further from her.

He was as completely in the dark as to her plans as if he were the veriest stranger. By the merest accident he was able to assure himself of the existence of the Minnie Werner her earlier telegram mentioned. He knew her to be an artist friend whom Marian had visited just before coming to the Caldwells a year and a half before, and there was a photograph somewhere in Marian's bed-chamber with the name, M. Werner,

A LETTER

upon it which he had one day picked up at random during one of their painful conferences, while Marian yawned and trailed her rose-colored *négligée* about the room in undisguised impatience, and treated him as an intruder. But he had the impression that the girl was herself a stranger in Cincinnati, and practically unknown. He remembered indistinctly having been told that she had been recently married, and he could only recall her maiden name. He had not the remotest clue with regard to her address.

The special estrangement of the past few months rendered the situation peculiarly trying. He gazed gloomily into the fire, more disturbed than he had been at any time since his anxiety had been aroused. What possible object she could have in shrouding her movements in mystery he failed to divine. Why had she not frankly told him when she should return? There had been no mention of the probable length of her visit, nothing to relieve his mind. On the contrary, the second telegram had been strangely ambiguous. There was a hint of finality in it that had startled him when he first read it. It was long, almost a note, and he knew it by heart. But he had tried to quiet the indefinite foreboding that had gripped his heart when it came, and that again was beginning to steal over him. He strove resolutely to combat it now as he sat listening absently to a boisterous wind that

THE INVISIBLE BOND

beat persistently against the house, and watched the curling lilac flames upon his deserted hearthstone.

But he was hard pressed with a gnawing pain that would not be ignored. He was distinctly miserable as he grappled with this new evidence of the widening of the breach between them, and conscious of a benumbing sense of failure. And after a while, in order to force his thoughts into calmer channels, he reached forth a hand to the table and mechanically picked up the first thing it touched upon.

It chanced to be the January number of the critical journal that Marian had brought home with her from Cincinnati six or seven weeks previous. Afterwards she had subscribed to it, and this copy, the first one he had seen, had just come in. He turned the pages aimlessly, and finally his eye was caught by an article on the poet Henley, and he read a paragraph or two. The writer's style was interesting, and the sketch held him. Presently he came upon these lines quoted in illustration:

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul."

The magazine fell from his grasp, and with a half-uttered exclamation he rose to his feet. His eyes were shining, and his whole being was quiveringly alive to the words that had come upon him as a trumpet call

A LETTER

suddenly sounded. For a moment he stood staring straight ahead of him, like a soldier facing his commander with head erect and muscles tense and waiting; and he came to himself with a start when a sound outside forced itself upon his consciousness.

But the look of exalted feeling, of that profound sense of uplift that sometimes comes to the overburdened soul through sources the most unexpected, and to which it lends itself as to angelic ministrations, was still lingering upon his features and in his attitude when he responded to a knock upon the door.

James entered. He held a letter, and the negro was profuse in apologies. The letter had come at noon, and had been safely laid aside to be delivered as soon as Roger should arrive. But business had detained the young lawyer, and he had had luncheon down town; and as it had been for James a particularly busy day, he had found the extra tax upon his memory a little too much for him.

"I dunno huccome me to fergit," he declared in great disturbance, his under jaw lax and his mouth wide open.

Roger reached out carelessly. "Oh, that is all right, James," he said, kindly, seeing the man's comic but very real distress over his lapse. He had presupposed the contents, and instantly inferred that it was merely a note of invitation including both Marian and

THE INVISIBLE BOND

himself, or something equally as unimportant. He was sure that if Marian had written she would have directed her letter to his office, and he should already have received it.

But the moment he took it into his hand he knew that it was from Marian. It was a lengthy communication, and he checked an involuntary expression of surprise as his rapid glance, sweeping past her bold and dashing chirography, fell upon the postmark: the letter had been mailed in New York.

James retired and Roger opened the envelope speedily. At the first two sentences his face blanched to a strained, ghastly pallor that slowly faded into a sort of gray, granite-like hue, as if his countenance had become gradually petrified. Then an awful crimson mounted to his brow and stayed there. She wrote:

“I shall go straight to the point in this letter. I wish you to know at once that I have taken myself out of your life — and forever. We were mismated. You never loved me, and I always knew why you married me, and that it was for the reason that I made you do it. I made you, or rather, your honor made you; for I could not quite have the consolation of believing that in this supreme act it was your inclination that consented as well as your volition. Perhaps wounded vanity may be an explanation to you of something. But it can hardly explain everything, and I am sure

A LETTER

there is nothing I can say that will make you ever think with anything like extenuation of the thing I have done; you are too stern a moralist. Briefly, I have left you that my life may be spent with some one who loves me and whom I love!

“I think I can picture to myself your wrath at thought of the man who has thus dared to intrude himself between you and me, and to whom I am now joyfully, and *triumphantly* turning. Your anger will doubtless be a Kentuckian’s anger, and one knows what that usually means. But a Kentuckian prefers, I believe, to kill his adversary in even combat, and I am quite sure that he would not fight you. Not because he isn’t brave. He is fearless, but he would find it wholly impossible to understand your point of view. He loves me — you do not love me — then why any fuss at all? Perhaps we shall both pay the penalty some day. There seems to be a Nemesis for such as we that is unswerving. So be it. Nothing can frighten me. If there were torture awaiting me, and if it were to be greater ten thousand times ten thousand than that any other woman has ever endured, I still should do precisely what I have done.

“And now before I bring my letter to a close there is one more thing. It concerns — the Secret. Ever since I have known you I have lived under an agony of apprehension lest you should discover it. Now it is even a relief to speak of it. It seems to reveal me, after all these months of concealment, as merely the product of my heredity, and to shift the blame from individual responsibility to those ancient forces that

THE INVISIBLE BOND

have been at work with humanity from the very beginning. I can see your start of horror at what I shall tell you, yet something urges me on.

“I wish you to know that I am the child of one who, like myself, placed love above law, and in whose veins there flowed wine instead of blood — rich red wine that glowed and sparkled, and made the senses reel, as in the days when the world was young and nature was supreme. But to make everything clear to you, it is necessary to go back a little.

“Generations ago we were respectable, but gradually we drifted downward in the social scale until our position was the humblest. My mother was beautiful. She was the wife of a little Yankee florist who kept a shop on one of the side streets in Richmond. My mother stood behind the counter and sold flowers to any who would buy. Among her customers was a young man, very wealthy, who came every day for a rose to wear in his buttonhole. He was the son of a New England Abolitionist who had drifted down to Virginia at the close of the Civil War, and speedily grown rich on the misfortunes of the impoverished Southerners. The whole family was despised, and for the sake of companionship the young man used to spend hours in the flower store. One day my mother disappeared with him. She was gone for more than a year. Then the florist died. Shortly afterward my mother returned, bought the little shop in which she used to stand, and established herself at the business, this time on a larger scale. She brought back with her a little girl of three months to whom she gave the

A L E T T E R

name, which she still retained, of the dead florist, and her own name, Marian.

“After I was ten years old I was never but once in Virginia. My mother pinched and saved, and sent me off to a good school. It was even possible, later on, to give me a college education. Afterwards her health failed, and I was able by teaching to make a meager support for us both. That one time I was in Richmond I never forgot. I was just eleven. One night a carriage drove up to our doorway, and an elderly woman, very handsomely dressed, with a hard, proud face, got out. She came to my mother to make inquiry of the wealthy New England people who had lived next door to her all the time they were in Richmond, and with whom she had had some business dealing. The family had mysteriously disappeared. She made no pretense of sparing the situation; and she evidently supposed me to be too young a child to understand. But I did understand. It was my first acquaintance with the Secret.

“That is all. I know that it is a great wrong I have done you, and I am sorry for your suffering. But for myself I regret nothing. I wish that I might have spared you — everything. But I was your destiny.

“We shall go abroad, and we shall lose ourselves in such a way that no one shall find us. I do not intend that you shall ever know, and I shall guard his name from discovery as Elaine guarded the sacred shield of Launcelot.

MARIAN.”

The last sheet fluttered from his hand and lay

THE INVISIBLE BOND

beside the rest on the rug at his feet, and still that dark, terrible flush remained, and still the expression of his features did not alter. Moments passed. All at once, as if the mighty passion that shook him had destroyed the work of centuries, reducing him from a highly civilized state of being to that of utter barbarism, a low growl as of an infuriated wild beast broke from him, and he sprang to his feet. For an instant he stood like one confronting a deadly foe whom he was eager to fall upon and throttle, his form quivering in every nerve, his eyes dire and threatening, his face suddenly livid.

All the deeply implanted love and reverence for the home which is the groundwork of Anglo-Saxon character, and which, despite the records of their divorce courts, with the Kentuckian still amounts to a passion the most exalted; all the old savage spirit of protection and defense, the primordial instinct of the male, guarding his own and prompting to deeds of violence upon the smallest encroachment of his rights; all the hot, impetuous fury of a people only too prone to take the law into their own hands and to mete out judgment swift and terrible to the offender against its fireside peace, trusting to public sentiment and the "unwritten law" for justification — all this and more struggled in the blind, animal rage that possessed him.

A LETTER

In the first rush of emotion, thought of Marian and of her infidelity seemed held in a sort of stern abeyance to his overwhelming wrath against her unknown paramour; but presently a sense of the awful wreckage she had wrought in his life bore down full upon him, and with a cry of proud and bitter defiance, a bracing of all his powers, he flung out his arms, and began to stride up and down the room.

His spirit, already keyed to a high pitch of heroic endurance by the magnificent courage of the lines he had just read when her letter was given to him, was able still to rise unconquered from the blow she had dealt him, through an inherent dogged resistance, a certain toughness of fiber, that forbade him even now to succumb; and above the storm of tumultuous feeling that swayed him, once more he felt the thrill of the valiant, and again he heard the trumpet call.

The magazine lay open at the place, and he snatched it up from the table; and eagerly, hungrily, he read another verse:

“In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced or cried aloud;
Under the bludgeonings of chance,
My head is bloody, but unbowed.”

“Thank God!” he said to himself, hoarsely, between his clenched teeth, “thank God that I too am able to say that thing!” Then he read on, his excitement

THE INVISIBLE BOND

reaching to the point of frenzy, and his face wild and haggard—

“Beyond this place of wrath and tears,
Looms but the horror of the shade.
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

“It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll.
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.”

He had grown suddenly very white, and with a strange, luminous sort of pallor. He was trembling when he closed the magazine and laid it on the table. Perhaps the verses were non-Christian. Perhaps they were even impious in their tone of daring defiance. Perhaps they were nothing of the kind. Whatever they were, and he was too overwrought to think clearly, whatever they might mean, to him in that moment they meant only one thing: a spirit undaunted by terrible mortal trial. And as he lifted his head and looked the situation in the face, squarely, and with a full recognition of all its shame and all its hideousness, there came to him a solemn determination that sought with unclouded faith to invoke to itself the aid of the divine, as inwardly and in a sort of exaltation, he declared she should not, she should not destroy his life!

He stood a moment, and then once more he began that quick, nervous walk up and down the room, feeling

A L E T T E R

himself in his great agony caged within the narrow space like some savage thing entrapped. The desire for the complete aloneness that can come to one only in the midst of a vast solitude, for the feel upon his hot brow of the icy cold of the wintry night, for the revivifying and strengthening of the physical part of him through a resistance of nature's forces, presently drove him to the doorway. But with his hand on the knob he paused abruptly. A new thought had pierced him through and through, and brought him to a standstill with a sense of shock mightier than anything that had preceded it.

Until that instant the realization of any consequence to himself, save utter humiliation, in Marian's act had not taken hold of him. But all at once, like the flash of a lantern in the eyes of one groping in the darkness, the flame of a dazzling inquiry swept full into the secret chambers of his soul; and bewildered he put up his hand to his head and drew back, staggering a little and blinded.

But the light had reached to that furthest penetralia where, unknown even to himself, there had slumbered always through the dark months of his married life a longing perpetual and unquenchable — the longing for release. And he knew, with a sharp tightening of the muscles about the heart and a quick reeling of the brain, that he had come face to face with the question

THE INVISIBLE BOND

which, continually, until he should find its answer, would be before him day and night, maddening him with its sweet promptings, and taking on in its solution the profoundest of ethical meanings — the question, Would he, should he, demand his freedom?

CHAPTER VI

THE UNEXPECTED

It was a bright though blustering March morning several months later, and Judith Beverley was returning home after an errand that had taken her into a distant part of the town. She was a little cross and decidedly bored in spite of the warm spring sunshine and the pleasing consciousness that her new tailorgown of a clear blue broadcloth fitted her with a trimness that gave something like style to her short, over-plump figure.

She regarded the morning's work as an entirely useless expenditure of time and energy, and the demand for it as merely one of those vagaries of the maternal brain to which she must yield an enforced obedience. She had been somewhat compensated, however, for the effort. While making her way across one of the crowded thoroughfares she had come upon an old friend who had detailed to her certain choice bits of gossip — one in particular — which had sent her home eager to be the first to impart the exciting information.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

As she reached her own square she stood a moment looking steadily toward the great white house with the green shutters just before her, her expression betraying an interest that was seldom aroused in her in relation to that solitary abode.

Her keen eyes had caught a glimpse of the symbol of that which dignifies alike the home of a prince or peasant, and reduces all men to the level of a frail humanity — the common basis of inevitable unity. About the old-fashioned doorbell which so many times she had stood on tiptoe to reach there hung a wreath of snowy flowers, and from it long streamers of black ribbon fluttered in the moist, spring air.

From the rear of the building an aged negro with a basket on his arm emerged and came slowly toward her down the little foot-path that wound under the newly budding trees toward the front gate. He hobbled a little as he walked, and his decrepit form, arrayed in a cast-off suit of his dead master's clothes many times too large for him, was so bent and changed and shrunken that Judith did not immediately recognize him.

"Good morning, Uncle Lish," she said as she drew nearer, "I have been waiting here to speak to you."

The old negro put down his basket, gave a troubled glance around, and then raised a trembling hand to his head and removed his hat with the grace of the colonel himself.

THE UNEXPECTED

"Well, little mistis," he responded, slowly, "hit may be a good mawnin' to you, but de Lawd knows hit ain't no good mawnin' to me. I is been de cun'l's body-servant ever sence dat thar low lifeted Sam Munday done run off wid ole miss' silver sugar tongs, an' he gold watch an' chain what ole marster done give him on he death baid fifty year ago come next August, an' I is feelin' mighty poo'ly an' down in de mouf."

"Oh, I know, Uncle Lish!" cried Judith, sympathetically, "and I am so sorry for you. I am sure you will miss the colonel terribly; he was always so good to you. But you must cheer up. You know you still have Aunt Daphne."

"Daphne sho is a mighty good 'ooman, Miss Judy, dat she is, an' I ain' sayin' nuttin' agin' her, caze she kin roast de bes' shote an' make de bes' apple dumplin's I is ever sot down to, but she ain' de cun'l, an' hit ain' no use sayin' she is."

The old negro reached down somewhere in the depths of his coat pocket and brought forth a huge bandanna handkerchief with which he proceeded to mop his face.

"Daphne," he continued, "she lak to be waited on moughtly, but she ain' got no beahd to shave, an' no fine clothes to bresh, an' she don' keer nuttin' 'tall 'bout mint julep."

By such incontrovertible arguments Judith was

THE INVISIBLE BOND

silenced. "We didn't hear until quite late last evening of the colonel's death," she remarked, presently. "You know papa is away."

"Yassum — yassum, I knowed yo' pa wuz away. De cun'l done ax foh him whin he wuz fust took sick, an' I went arter him. Lawd, Lawd, I is knowed all 'long dat dis wuz gwine be a hard winter! I knowed it 'way down yonder last fall whin de big snow come, an' Daphne cooked dat tu'key. Ef hit didn't have de stronges' breas' bone you ever see! Den I knowed dat all de nuts out in de woods wuz laid by, caze de squir'ls done been moughty peart, and Brer Tompkins what lives out on de old Frankfort pike say de snakes an' de turkles done buhried down twice ez deep, an' de rabbits done got dey extry front teeth, an' de coons got dey tree coats o' hyar."

"It has been quite a cold winter for this part of the world," said Judith, "but it seems too bad that the colonel should have lived through it and then died just as the spring was coming on."

Uncle Lish slowly shook his head. "Whin Marse Gabr'el git ready to blow he horn he don' pay no 'tention to de time o' yeah, an' de time o' night neider. Yas, Lawd, hit ain' no use a-hangin' back den, an' sayin' what sort o' day you'd ruther go on, caze he ain' gwine stan' no foolin'. Howsomeveh, de cun'l wuz all ready. He had he uniform on, an' at de fust

THE UNEXPECTED

soun' o' de trumpet he r'ared hisse'f back an' he say, 'I is gwine to jine de gre't ahmy, Lish, an' I is gwine to meet my Commander face to face.' Gawd, what an ahmy! I seen 'em a-passin' an' a-passin' befo' my eyes twell I thought dey wuz gwine jump clean outen dey sockets. Dey kep' on a-comin' an a-comin', an' dey wuz a-shoutin' an' a-singin' at de ve'y top o' dey lungs, an' dey faces wuz shinin' lak de risin' sun; an' den all on a suddent I see de cun'l, an' he wuz ridin' on he white horse an' smilin' ez I ain' seen him smile sence Gin'ral Lee surrender, an' soon ez I cotched sight o' him I say, '*Gawd!* we done druv back de Yankees, an' dey ain' gwine be no mo' fightin' forever an' eveh, Amen!'"

At this solemn outburst Judith stood meditating and amazed. Somehow the colonel had never impressed her as being at all religious, and the spectacle that the old negro described presented him in an altogether new and different light from that in which she was wont to regard him.

Perhaps something of her surprise showed in her ordinarily impassive countenance, for Uncle Lish said quickly:

"He ain' nuver been de same sence Miss Sophie died, an' seem lak he grievin' he ve'y heahrt out, though he wuz heap too proud to let on much. Howsomeveh, I knowed de Lawd done teched him, an' dat huccome

THE INVISIBLE BOND

me to say one night right keerless lak, 'Marse Theoph' (honey, you knows I al'ays calls him Marse Theoph whin dey ain' none o' dem urr niggers 'roun'), 'Marse Theoph,' I say, 'don' you wan' me to tell Mr. Roger you is feelin' poo'ly?' You see I knowed hit would holp him moughtly to see Miss Sophie's boy. Gawd, ef you could seen de way he looked! I fa'rly trimbled whin he fixed he lightnin' eye on me. 'De *scamp!*' he say in a voice dat soun' lak thunder; 'don' you dar to bring him heah!' But de nex' mawnin' he say right sof', tu'nin' he eyes away, 'Lish, ef you thinks he would come —' and den he ain' say no mo'."

Judith had been listening with intensest interest. "You don't mean to tell me that he actually allowed Mr. Roger to come and see him?" she inquired. "I thought he simply hated him."

Uncle Lish eyed the girl gravely. "Honey," he said, falteringly, at last, in that pathetic, half-apologetic tone with which the old-time Southern negro always reminds the individual whom he profoundly respects of the supremacy of the Deity, "Honey, whin de good Lawd tek up he abode in de heaht, thar ain' no room lef' foh hate. He too big, an' seem lak he fill ever leetle corner lak de sunshine."

"Did Mr. Roger go to him?" asked Judith, quickly.

The old negro was gazing straight up into the heavens, blinking a little in the golden sunlight. Then

THE UNEXPECTED

without lowering his eyes he began to speak in a slow, singsong voice, falling into the weird intoning with which his race are accustomed to chant a requiem over their dead — the most mournful sound on earth to all who have ever heard it.

“De young marster come. He knelt down beside de baid. De cun’l raised he han’ an’ blessed him. De Lawd look down an’ smile. ‘Thar wuz angels eveh’ whar — at de foot an’ at de haid. I hearn ’em singin’ all de time. De cun’l hearn ’em too. He say, ‘I’m gwine home to glory, an’ de Lawd done wash me clean in de blood o’ de Lamb.’”

Judith’s face expressed a mingled curiosity and fright. Once in her childhood she had seen Uncle Lish in such a state of exalted religious ecstasy and it had taken no less than three large “crab lanterns,” two cakes of maple sugar, and an orange to quiet her. Involuntarily she made a movement of departure. But all at once the old negro brought his gaze back to earth, and his tone was altered completely when he next spoke. So sudden was the transition that Judith almost gasped for breath.

“Me and Daphne gwine have a new marster now,” he said, sadly and quietly, “but bless Gawd hit’ll be a good one, an’ ef hit ain, de cun’l hisse’f hit’s de cun’l’s grandson, an’ de Lawd knows I is been prayin’ day an’ night foh Miss Sophie’s chile. Yassum,” he added,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

nodding his head solemnly to Judith's mute, astonished stare, "Yassum, de cun'l done lef' him eveh'thing — all he gold an' silver in de bank, an all he houses an' lan's, an' sheep, an' cattle. Yas, Lawd, de gre't day of peace have come at las', an' dis ole nigger's done lived to see it, thank Gawd, thank Gawd!"

Judith had suddenly paled. She slowly turned her face away and for a moment was as silent as if stunned. Then she drew back a little.

"It is certainly a great day for Mr. Roger," she said, a trifle coldly, "for he will be one of the richest men in Fayette County. Now I must go, Uncle Lish, and thank you for telling me. I am sorry to see that your rheumatism isn't any better."

The old negro painfully reached down and picked up his basket. As he straightened himself a quaint humor for an instant traced itself upon his wrinkled countenance and quickly vanished, leaving its appealing, humble pathos only more pronounced.

"Well, little mistis, you ain't no sorrier'n I is," he said, as he hobbled through the gate.

Judith sped quickly homeward, heedless now of the frolicsome March wind, although it was blowing loose strands of hair across her eyes and robbing her of her customary neat, well-groomed appearance, her sole pretension to good looks. Two scarlet spots flamed in her cheeks and her expression betokened a dull,

THE UNEXPECTED

smoldering resentment. The astounding information concerning Roger's change of fortune only aggravated her feeling of irritation toward him; and though nearly a year and a half had elapsed since his marriage, it had not been long enough to cure her of the wound his indifference had inflicted. The fact that he had always seemed completely to ignore the possibility of a love affair between himself and her had only cut her vanity the more deeply; and the memory of it, the sting of it, had been a sort of poison that had threatened to undermine her whole moral constitution. She saw him now in a new aspect, with the halo about him that wealth to the shallow-hearted ever gives, and her disappointment at the loss of him increased ten-fold.

On entering her home she heard subdued voices proceeding from the library, and she made her way thither. There was a little low ripple of laughter as she appeared in the doorway, and the next instant Mrs. Caldwell, all smiles and sweetness and effusion, sprang from her chair and rustled forward, her silken skirts making a faint, familiar sound behind her, delicate and persistent as the invariable haunting perfume that pervaded her garments. There was something so individual in it, Judith would have recognized it in Europe and with her eyes closed; but for the moment she could scarcely believe her senses.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Where on earth did you come from?" she blurted out, standing stock-still on the threshold.

"From California," replied Mrs. Caldwell, naïvely, with a comical elevation of the eyebrows. "Did I startle you? But I am a very substantial-looking ghost. I have gained ten pounds, I grieve to say. Mrs. Beverley, can't you do something for me?"

Mrs. Beverley surveyed her guest gravely and critically, and quite as if she were beholding her for the first time. Then all at once something in the little, tight, partridge-like form appealed to her sense of humor, and she was off immediately, indulging in one of her prolonged fits of laughter, from which she finally emerged mopping her eyes and elegantly murmuring her apologies.

"My dear," she exclaimed at last, somewhat ambiguously, "I have never seen you looking better in my life; the climate of California must have agreed with you."

"I should think it did," put in Judith, as she plumped herself down into a chair and unbuttoned her jacket. "You certainly stayed long enough. When was it you went? Just after Roger Bolling's wedding, wasn't it — fifteen months ago?"

Mrs. Caldwell's face changed quickly. "Just afterwards. But we came back here for a short time last summer on business. I believe you were away," she said, and let the subject fall.

THE UNEXPECTED

"By the way, have you heard the news?" Judith asked carelessly at length, making her gloves into a little ball and tossing them with her jacket on the table. "There are three quite exciting things."

Mrs. Beverley glanced toward Mrs. Caldwell, and the latter answered.

"I have only just returned, Judith," she said. "We came yesterday, and you two are the first persons I have seen. I know of very little that has happened since we went away."

Judith's expression was stealthy and a trifle suspicious.

"Oh, but you must have heard again and again from Roger, so that nothing that greatly concerns him could be unknown to you."

"I have had only two letters from Roger since we went away," said Mrs. Caldwell, very quietly. "Does your news concern him?"

"Slightly," remarked Judith, with her eyes on the ceiling.

"But I thought you said you had three things to tell, my dear," said Mrs. Beverley, whose curiosity was piqued in spite of herself.

Judith nodded and laughed tantalizingly. "I surely did," she answered.

There was silence. Mrs. Caldwell looked at the clock and moved a little uneasily in her chair. But

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Judith, with her gaze still on the ceiling, appeared wholly unconscious of her discomfiture. Presently she turned abruptly to her mother.

“Did you know that the judge and Sibyl are expected home this evening?”

Mrs. Beverley looked up surprised. “Judge Fontaine and Sibyl? Why, no. I thought they were still in Europe. Who told you?”

“Oh, I heard it down town — that and something else.”

“I don’t see,” began Mrs. Caldwell, with a little nervous catch in her voice, “what their arrival has to do with Roger. I thought you said that your news concerned him. I don’t see —”

“Don’t you?” Judith fixed her gaze coolly upon the face of her questioner and stared until the little woman dropped her eyes. “Don’t you? But you know that he was just upon the point of falling in love with Sibyl when he met your Miss Day, and it seems rather thrilling that he should now go to live next door to her — since the lovely Marian has fled.”

“Judith, what do you mean?” cried Mrs. Beverley, severely, “what is all this nonsense you are hinting at?”

“Nothing at all,” replied Judith, imperturbably, “except that old Colonel Hart got religion at the last and left his entire estate to Roger.”

“Oh!” cried the two women, simultaneously, and

THE UNEXPECTED

then stared each other wonderingly in the eyes. Each was busy with her own thoughts, and a strange stillness reigned. Presently Mrs. Beverley turned and looked at Judith. There was in her face a curious commingling of emotions, a broad generosity of feeling that could completely forget self in her pleasure in the good fortune of another; yet encroaching upon it, though never threatening to overthrow it, there was something else, the maternal, the personal, intensely strong with her, if not too strong to outweigh justice. A marriage between Judith and Roger Bolling would have been at any time most agreeable to her. His own intrinsic qualities and high social position were things that she was able fully to appreciate; and the vulgar exaltation of money was an abasement that she had been safely rescued from, just as it was also something from which the doctor was equally removed. But if wealth could give little in their estimation to the inherently sordid-minded, the plebeian of soul as well as of outward station, it was able to add a very gracious charm to the true patrician of birth and heart; and as she studied her most unsatisfactory offspring there sprang up within Mrs. Beverley a very human regret which most mothers would not have found it difficult to understand.

"And the other thing, my dear, that you had to tell us?" she inquired, suavely.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Judith broke into a harsh, unfeeling laughter, and turned her head provokingly to one side, while she surveyed the two askance.

"How lamentable that there should be anything more!" she exclaimed, shortly. "If only the curtain might drop upon Roger and his princely inheritance without reference to anything else. But unfortunately there is too much reference just now to — something else."

Mrs. Caldwell looked up quickly. "Please explain," she said, in a trembling voice. "Tim and I are his best friends here, but we neither of us know anything definitely, only that something is terribly, pitifully wrong."

Judith gave her a brief, sidelong glance in which there was a hint of malice deliberately unconcealed. Mrs. Caldwell's apparent part in the destiny of the man she had longed for, though it had in no way altered conditions with regard to herself, was something that had always filled her with an unreasoning resentment, and her revenge had found secret satisfaction in the sort of torture that may be inflicted by a needless withholding and delay. However, she was beginning to be bored, and she was reminded that it was nearly luncheon time by the striking of the clock on the mantel.

She coughed exasperatingly, stretched out her feet

THE UNEXPECTED

toward the fender and regarded the tips of her shoes for an instant. Then all at once she leaned forward, and in a stage whisper loud enough to be heard throughout the room she poured her information into the little woman's ear.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH ROGER COMES INTO HIS OWN

THREE weeks later Roger took up his abode in the great lonely house that had been his grandfather's, the colonel having laid special emphasis upon the wish that the change of residence be as soon as possible effected. Upon this point he had even shown a return to his customary spirit of peremptory command, and Roger had finally given way, though not, however, without a reluctance that he did not try to explain. The old gentleman's extraordinary alteration of attitude, which had come about through the sure workings of sorrow, the very real grief he had suffered in the death of Mrs. Bolling, and in his repentance for hardness toward her, had been in truth rendered far less difficult of attainment by the secret satisfaction that he had long cherished with regard to his grandson. From all sides praise of the young man had been wafted to him; and on the rare evenings when, despite his increasing infirmities, his house had been opened to certain favorite cronies, bidden to a game of whist

ROGER COMES INTO HIS OWN

enlivened by a hot supper served with old Madeira or choicest port, it not unfrequently happened that one of the number would casually let fall a reference to a member of the Lexington bar that set the aged pulses a-tingling, and made him eager for the reconciliation that had finally been accomplished.

It was a moist April evening when Roger dined for the first time in his new home. James who had been still retained, although eyed by Uncle Lish askance, had been sent ahead to see that all was in readiness, and had been duly snubbed by the ancient retainers of the house into such a state of humility that Roger, when he finally arrived, was met by a countenance so subdued and woebegone that he involuntarily broke into laughter at sight of it. An instant afterward, however, the pale face of the young man had grown a shade paler, and with a gesture of weariness he hung his hat on the old elk rack and strode with echoing footsteps down the long hall, and then on into the room adjoining what his grandfather had called the office.

After he had dined he made a futile effort to interest himself in a book that he took at random from the shelves on returning to the library. But to-night he could not read, and by and by when the house grew still he rose and wandered from room to room, turning on the electric lights, and then looking about him like a lost spirit vainly seeking he knew not what. The

THE INVISIBLE BOND

old Hart portraits, those of persons of the name or of the blood, were everywhere, for the colonel had been able to obtain, as supplementary to those he had inherited, many that came into his hands through the impoverishment of their original owners.

As he flung himself into a chair he found himself thinking grimly of the manner with which all who had gone before him would have met the tragedy of his life.

There would have been but one way, he knew: death to the man who had dared the wrong and divorce-ment to the woman. And yet, torn with passions no less terrible than would have been theirs, feeling that same fierce love for the home and protection of it which was always profoundly dominant with the people of his race, and which with the Kentuckian often breaks forth into a sort of blind, animal rage resulting in bloodshed when once a sin against the family has been committed, he had acted as not one of his forefathers would have acted, he felt sure. The temptation to stifle the promptings of the larger view, of which they would have known nothing, had driven him at first almost to madness. For weeks he had grappled with it, longing to free himself from the bond which the law of God and man seemed to allow him in good conscience to dissolve, all the time knowing that his choice was already made through that sense

ROGER COMES INTO HIS OWN

of sacred obligation toward one's fellows which his age was the first practically to apprehend, and which in the end would compel him to wave an individual right for the sake of a far-reaching gain.

For individualism had passed into altruism. He had at last arrived at a strong intellectual conception that marked a prodigious advance in his own personal development. And it had given him a deeper reverence for law, from which springs the soundness and the purity of national life, a clearer comprehension of the value of the individual, from which springs a recognition of the dignity and worth of human life.

From a legal as well as a social point of view the young lawyer had studied the situation growing out of a lack of uniformity in the statutes concerning marriage and divorce existing in the various commonwealths of the Union. He had carefully weighed the oft-debated question of Constitutional amendment and subsequent legislation by Congress whereby the Federal courts should be solely invested with the power to grant divorce, as opposed to the idea of the states' rights to legislate for themselves; and he knew, through a thoughtful consideration of the figures obtainable, that the number of divorces granted in the United States annually so far exceeded the number granted in other countries as to bring before the mind a proportion appallingly serious, thus making plain a condition

THE INVISIBLE BOND

of things inherently alarming, and which, if unchecked, tended to the overthrow of the very foundation stones of the nation's greatness.

These things he knew; and yet — All at once he rose and began to move up and down the room, his hands tightly clenched, his face set. For once more the battle, hotter, fiercer, more blinding than ever before, was upon him, and to-night, as he seemed to stand on the threshold of a new existence that offered to him such unlimited possibilities, tender as well as glorious, he wanted, he wanted his freedom! How he longed for it!

Every nerve and fiber in him was crying out for release. Passions strong and elemental were clamoring and refusing to be silenced. The blood of an untrammelled race was stirring in him and rousing him to revolt. Sacrifice? It was noble, it was godlike, yes — but oh, the wild joy of beginning life over again, of feeling the cool, invigorating breeze of the dawn of another and more splendid day of promise that was to usher in the full play of all his manly powers! How could he close his eyes to the sights they saw, his ears to the sounds they heard, how stifle his whole being quivering and throbbing at the bare thought of renewal?

For more than an hour he walked there, caged, miserable, rebellious; but after a time a great weariness began to steal over him, and as usual in such moments

ROGER COMES INTO HIS OWN

the longing came to him overwhelmingly for his mother, that he might fling himself down as in childhood at her feet and pour out his griefs to her, while every bit of him sobbed for something. He gave a wondering look about him, as if appalled by his own desolateness.

It was late, and the old house was very still, brooding in solemn quietude over the memories it held. Suddenly, as if possessed of an uncontrollable desire for human contact, for anything that should break the spell of the despair that was upon him, Roger crossed the room and drew back the window curtain. The act revealed a familiar scene.

His neighbor's house was still lighted, and Judge Fontaine, sitting in his customary high-backed chair, was beside his library table busily writing, the light from a student's lamp falling softly on his silvery hair and patrician features. In the room above a single taper burned dimly.

All the curtains in the judge's library were drawn, but at one window they had been pulled carelessly, leaving a space large enough to reveal a portion of the room; and before this small interstice Roger stood gazing like a man starving in sight of bread, yet powerless to reach forth a hand to take it. By a strong effort of will he kept his eyes resolutely upon a level with the room opposite, not once, after that first glance, lifting them to the room above.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

A voice seemed sounding in his ears: "Be pleased with little things, such as the flourishing of a tree or a plant, or a bed of flowers, and fret not at disappointments." They were the words out of an old letter, from one of his ancestors that the judge had once quoted; and again they were speaking their message of peace through patience, the profoundest of all philosophy. For a moment Roger stood as one transfixed, hearing the voice almost as an actuality. A change came over his features; the desperation, the recklessness, the agitation fled, and in their place there was the quiet of resignation, the brave front which, until to-night, he had worn through many long days.

He drew back a step or two from the window, but the hand that still held the curtain trembled a little and quickly tightened its hold. Then slowly, reverently, he came nearer again, and as one lifts his eyes to a star, his gaze traveled to the taper in the room above. An instant afterward the curtain fell from his grasp, and he turned away.

CHAPTER VIII

SIBYL

THE April sunlight was shining in at the window when he woke the next morning and looked about him with that peculiar, half-painful sensation of bewilderment that one feels on first opening his eyes after a night's sleep in unfamiliar surroundings. As he surveyed the wide bed-chamber with its stately and somewhat dreary furnishings, its absence of the individual note which James had evidently made frantic but futile efforts to atone for by an ostentatious display of Roger's personal belongings scattered here and there, his first thought had been one of regret for the cheerier apartment but lately abandoned.

As he went down the stairs the chill and gloom of the long halls were vault-like to his senses, and he hurried out into the sunlight, pausing to give a hint to Aunt Daphne in the kitchen as he passed on his way into the garden, with the hope that thus encouraged his breakfast would be the sooner in forthcoming. But it was presumption born of inexperience, as he

THE INVISIBLE BOND

soon discovered. Aunt Daphne was not a person to be urged to precipitation in the performance of those culinary tasks which with her reached almost to the dignity of a religious ceremonial. Moreover, it was to be her first breakfast for the young master, and she intended it to be a good one.

"Bless Gawd!" he heard her muttering as she moved about the kitchen, between low chuckles of laughter, her cracked old voice floating out to him through the open window, "Bless Gawd, ef thar ain' Miss Sophie's chile talkin' 'bout breakfast, an' I ain' nuver even teched de feathers on dem birds!"

Seeing that there was little likelihood of accelerating matters, Roger good-humoredly, with his hands in his pockets and whistling carelessly to himself, went down the rear steps of the building and on into the sunny space beyond.

At first sight of him, mistaking him doubtless for Uncle Lish with their breakfast, the dogs made a bound forward and came tearing across the yard at full speed, drawing back a little and eyeing him suspiciously, however, as soon as they discovered him. But he called them to him, and bent down and patted them, and they were quickly won, falling upon him with a gusto which, though flattering, was also slightly uncomfortable, especially when they all made a rush at him at once.

SIBYL

"See here, you fellows, five against one, it's hardly fair, you know!" cried Roger, with a laugh, struggling to his feet, and almost stumbling over a little three-weeks-old white and tan puppy that, hearing the great commotion, had come toddling after the rest.

As he pushed them off, all at once he was conscious of a voice near by — a woman's voice, low and sweet, and singing in the tender, disjointed, half-confidential fashion, as if to an unseen presence, that is peculiarly feminine and which women sometimes fall into when bending over their sewing or when tucking sleepy little forms into bed. Now and then it broke off entirely and seemed to be borne away on the cool morning breeze like a thing too fine and beautiful to linger; but a moment after it would begin again, and come floating toward him, though always from a different quarter.

With a sudden tightening of the muscles about the mouth, Roger straightened himself and looked toward his neighbor's garden. There was a tall osage orange hedge between the two places where the respective plots began to slope away from the buildings, and in the center of the hedge there was a little arched gateway which the colonel had had made for the convenience of Judge Fontaine and Sibyl when they should desire to visit informally their old friend.

Until that instant Roger had not observed the tiny

THE INVISIBLE BOND

gateway, and he stood looking toward it with an expression dazed and vaguely troubled, as once more the song traveled to him as from some one bending over a near-by bed of flowers.

He was turning away when suddenly the arch framed a picture, and Sibyl stood before him, while the same caressing voice asked cheerfully:

“Uncle Lish, is Shot any better this morning?”

She wore a white piqué gown and lawn waist, and she carried in her hand a huge nosegay of hyacinths and daffodils which she was intent upon rearranging.

“I thought I heard him whining a little,” she added, absently, with her gaze on her flowers, “when I first came out.”

Roger stared dumbly, rendered speechless equally by her unexpected presence and the great change that he beheld in her, the wondrous blossoming whereby the depth and sweetness of her womanhood stood revealed. She seemed years older than when he last saw her, and far more beautiful. The soft rounding that time had given to her girlish contours; the more wistful seriousness in the violet eyes at war with the piquant archness of the warm red mouth; the glimmer of the sunlight on her blue-black hair, and the healthful whiteness of her skin, all flashed upon him in an instant, and he dropped his eyes and then looked quickly

away, abashed and undecided, a painful self-consciousness making him powerless to utter a word.

She was still intent on the flowers, and unobservant, and as she twisted and turned them to her liking several hyacinths fell from her hands to the ground, thus distracting her attention from her inquiry.

He sprang quickly forward to restore them, and something in the alertness of the movement, in strange contrast with what she had expected from Uncle Lish's stiffened joints, caused her to look up wonderingly.

She drew back with a little cry of amazement and confusion. Then speedily collecting herself she held out her hand, smiling softly. There was a large sympathy in her complete ignoring; and in her straightforward earnestness and self-forgetfulness there was something so broad and sweet and kindly that it seemed to lift her immediately out of all relation to age or sex.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "is it you — really you? But I thought you were not to come for days and days."

"I came last night," said Roger, not meeting her eyes. He took the hand she gave him, but released it instantly, a sudden stiffening coming into his manner.

But she did not seem to notice. She was trembling a little still from the surprise he had given her, and a soft pink like the inner lining of a sea-shell lingered

THE INVISIBLE BOND

in her cheeks; but her gaze was as fearless and direct as a little child's. It was evident that she meant at once to establish a basis between them that would relieve him of all constraint, and that the best way toward the accomplishment of this seemed to her to lead through a tactful avoidance. She would have liked to make some simple reference to the changes, but as the circumstances precluded, it appeared the better course to spare — everything.

"Last night?" she echoed. "I am so sorry that we didn't know. Father would surely have gone over to welcome you as a neighbor, and I shall dread to tell him that you spent your first evening in such lonely fashion. He is very eager for a long talk with you."

Roger was silent a moment. In the honeysuckle vines near by a red bird was saying a prolonged good-by to his mate, breaking forth all at once into such a flood of broken-hearted and impetuous melody that they both involuntarily looked up to listen.

"The judge has been always most kind to me," said Roger, at length, with his eyes still on the ground. He had grown very pale, and the distance that he seemed to be trying to keep up between them was accentuated by the dulness of the tone in which he spoke. But Sibyl gave no heed.

"Oh, but he is so fond of you," she responded, simply; "he quite regards you as one of his best friends

— the very best, and he has already been three times to see you, twice to your office, and once to your home. Each time he missed you, and came back looking so dejected that I had to beg him to read me four long chapters of the history, just to divert him. I know them almost by heart, for he always reads everything to me over and over, but it seemed to help him wonderfully, although I could not flatter myself that I was half so satisfactory a listener as you would have been.”

“How is the history coming on?” asked Roger, quickly, grasping at a change of subject and smiling, compelled to a momentary self-forgetfulness by the picture that she drew. One of the sweetest things about her had seemed to him the naïve way with which she threw herself into the judge’s historical and genealogical research.

“The history?” she cried, gaily. “It is coming on finely. He has almost finished the period relating to the pioneers, and is about to enter upon the struggle for independence from Virginia. It is going to be a terrible time, and I shall have many heartaches for those poor dead Kentuckians of the long ago, who had to wait so many years before they could become a state. He did much of his best work while we were in Rome; and while I was dreaming of the ancients, he was dreaming of Kentucky. He worked everywhere

THE INVISIBLE BOND

we went, and I am sure he didn't see anything half so entertaining to him as the first glimpse he had of his beloved bluegrass from the car window."

Roger looked up quickly. "And you — were you sorry to come back?"

She hesitated. "A little — just a little," she answered, and for the first time there was a slight betrayal of constraint.

She turned away and her gaze wandered to the great white house beyond. "We would have come back sooner," she said, presently, very softly, "if we had known of the colonel's illness. He never mentioned it, though he wrote constantly. Father and I both loved him dearly. How we shall miss him!"

A mist had gathered in her eyes, and she went on quickly. "He was so alive, such a distinct personality, that I had never realized that he actually could die; and though he was so old I seemed to think I should have him always. Everything here is associated with him; that is his chair up on that porch, here is his bench under this tree, and I can almost see the tall form over there by the kennels swearing at the dogs for being too audaciously frolicsome. You know —" and all at once, by one of those swift transitions that sometimes swept over her, her whole face twinkling with archness — "you know he just couldn't *help* swearing once in a while, the poor old dear!"

SIBYL

Roger threw back his head and something like the boyish laughter of other days broke from him.

"He surely couldn't," he replied, grimly.

"But it was such an aristocratic, picturesque sort of swearing," returned Sibyl, still bubbling over with amusement, "and I am sure he didn't mean the least little bit of harm by it."

Upon this point Roger was not quite so decided, but he said nothing, and all at once Sibyl caught herself up. "I really must go," she said, "and I hope I haven't kept you from your breakfast. Lawyers have to have early breakfasts, don't they, when court is going on?"

"They do, but they don't always get it," replied Roger, ruefully, with a glance in the direction of Aunt Daphne's domains.

"But you know the colonel never had breakfast until nearly ten."

"Good gracious! You don't think she is pre-meditating anything like that against me, do you?"

Sibyl shook her head. "I shouldn't wonder."

"But it is absolutely imperative that I should be in the court room by nine o'clock," said Roger, genuinely alarmed.

"You are '*jes*' '*bleeged*' to be there, as Uncle Lish would say, aren't you?" commented Sibyl, giving him little comfort by her cheerful acquiescence. Her

THE INVISIBLE BOND

blue eyes were quite grave, but the corners of her mouth were twitching suspiciously.

"I never dreamed that James wouldn't be able to make her understand," said Roger, still serious, and seeing no joke at all in a situation that threatened dire things to his client. "Tell me," with a nod that was intended to indicate the presiding genius of his kitchen, "is she really a very terrible sort of person? I am horribly afraid of her."

"You'd better be. Don't you know that she has always ruled this house with a rod of iron?"

Roger looked completely crushed.

"Then there is just no help at all for me," he answered, dolefully, recalling the methods of the high-handed old gentleman who had preceded him, and who, if unable to cope with such oppression, surely left little grounds for confidence in the breast of less daring mortals.

"Oh, yes, there is," cried Sibyl, charmingly, "you can come over and have breakfast with father and me. Ours is just ready now. Since we have been writing the history we rival the lark as early risers."

His face changed quickly. He started and stiffened again instantly, growing painfully self-conscious, while a hot flush mounted to his forehead and then slowly receded, leaving him very pale and still. Through

SIBYL

her determined friendly ease and freedom from embarrassment he had unconsciously accepted the attitude which from the first she had maintained — that of one human being toward another human being brought within each other's radius solely by the claims of neighborliness and of a mutual kindly feeling. And with an exquisite tact that seemed to lead him as gently over the rough places of memory that kept protruding as a mother might lead a troubled child along a rugged pathway, she had accomplished it; so that by her naturalness and straightforward sincerity she had for the moment lulled him into a sort of forgetfulness of his past.

"Won't you come?" she insisted, smiling. "We are to have waffles and maple syrup. You like waffles and maple syrup, don't you?"

"Immensely."

"Then you will accept?"

"I am afraid I cannot," he answered, gravely.

"Remember your poor trusting client!"

"I do remember," he said.

"And be not scornful of the despotism of Aunt Daphne. Your breakfast has not even begun to be cooked yet, I am perfectly certain."

"I am afraid you are only too correct about it," replied Roger, with a despairing glance kitchenward.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Then do be warned and come with us. It will be far safer."

He met her eyes for the briefest possible space. Then he quickly looked away, and with an expression whose somber humorousness was but an outward cloak for an inward rebellion, his gaze wandered once more in the direction of the buxom sable figure passing to and fro in front of one of the rear windows. He broke into a short, discordant laugh.

"It will be far safer not to," he said, abruptly.

CHAPTER IX

THE INVISIBLE BOND

IT was in the twilight of an afternoon a few days later, as Roger was returning home from his office, that the two men came upon each other, apparently by accident, but in reality through deep design on the part of the judge.

"Well met, my boy!" he exclaimed, heartily, as he suddenly emerged from a drugstore on a corner that Roger would most likely pass, and bustled up, well-groomed, elegant, and fresh-faced as a boy, holding out a slim, graceful hand that grasped the one outstretched to it with a cordiality that was not to be gainsaid. "How does the world go with you?" he began at once, and then before Roger could reply, he hurried on, "I hear that you won your great case. Caldwell has told me. It was a magnificent triumph, sir — a magnificent triumph, but no more than was to be expected from the descendant of your distinguished sires. I should like much to talk over certain points in relation to it. Bless me, when I see

THE INVISIBLE BOND

you young fellows in the thick of it I am sorely tempted to go back and have a fling at you."

"I wish you would, sir," responded Roger, gallantly, "it doesn't do a fellow any harm to get knocked down once in a while, and I've no doubt that you'd teach the last one of us a thing or two, the oldest and the wisest."

"I confess," said the judge, confidentially, and in his prim but stately fashion, "that the courtroom still has strong attractions for me that at times I find it hard to resist, but I should dislike to have Sibyl know that I ever waver in my allegiance to the history. She was convinced that my health was suffering under the strain of a somewhat arduous practice that soon came to me after my retirement from the bench, and it was through her persuasions, as you may know, that I abandoned the law. However, it was only after she had discovered that I was sitting up more than half the night and rising at daybreak to add a little to that sum of knowledge in the way of historical investigation which from a boy I have been accumulating, that she pronounced the verdict."

"It was a wise decision, judge," said Roger, as they walked on, with the modest though firm conviction that always ingratiated him strongly in the favor of older men. "You would find the bar greatly changed since your day, and you would be haunted by the old memories continually."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

The judge's face grew softly sad. "Ah, the memories — the memories!" he murmured. "How they come flocking into the mind, fair and spotless — like a flight of white-winged birds following hard upon one another — at mention of the most trivial thing in relation to the past. Time is the greatest of all artists, and the picture that he paints for us is one that only grows softer and more beautiful as the years go by. How he tones down life's uglinesses and exalts the human stature! All large men are giants when seen through memory's mist; and there were few pygmies among those with whom I used to practice. Why, my dear boy," he cried, waxing more animated as his thoughts continued to travel backward, "I could tell you stories of the old Lexington bar — of Johnson, and Huston, and Buckner, and the two Kinkeads, and Hunt, and Harrison, and Beck, and Breckinridge — of their wit, and eloquence, and learning, that would keep you awake till cock-crow."

"I should surely delight to hear them," said Roger, cordially, but at the same time making a movement of turning in at his own home, which they had just reached, and lifting his hat in token of departure.

But the judge laid violent hands upon him. Anticipating the intention of the young man, he took a quick step forward and with a countenance that was not to be moved by either argument or entreaty, calmly

THE INVISIBLE BOND

interposed his slender person between Roger and the gateway, nearly upsetting his top hat in his vehemence, and letting his cane fall.

“Not a bit of it, sir — not a bit of it!” he cried, with sudden energy. “You are to dine with us this evening, and you need offer no objection. I was expecting a friend from Louisville who has disappointed me, and there is a special feast prepared. You must share it. Sibyl will have out her prettiest old silver candelabra, and you will dine by the light of wax candles upon strawberries served in cut-glass that was once the pride of her great-great-grandmother.”

Roger reached for the fallen cane and, having restored it, was beginning, “The prospect is most alluring, judge, but —” when the judge interrupted shortly.

“Tut, tut!” he exclaimed, with something very like a show of real indignation in his voice. “Do you think I am going to allow my will to be thwarted by a youngster like you? I don’t propose to let you live the life of a hermit, sir, and you may as well resign yourself at once. Your grandfather in his younger days was one of the most genial of diners-out that I can remember. He had a very remarkable fund of anecdote and, though he was peevish upon some points and liable to flare up on occasion, he was always the most acceptable of guests. Well do I recall the time that the president of Princeton University — Princeton College it was

THE INVISIBLE BOND

then — was in our midst, and a great dinner was given in his honor. Your grandfather was the life of the occasion, and the president remarked after returning to the East that, though he had traveled far and made the acquaintance of men of high station in all quarters of the globe, he had met in his experience with no more princely representative of the gentleman of the old school than Colonel Theophilus Hart.”

At this flood of reminiscence Roger stood helpless and confused, longing to make his escape from what only too plainly portended, yet dreading to offend.

“I am sure,” continued the judge, in his most Johnsonian English, and with a note of finality in the words that seemed to imply that the discussion was ended, “that you will accede to my wishes when I tell you that I greatly desire your comment in relation to certain chapters of the history recently written.”

“I shall be pleased to hear them,” replied Roger, meekly, realizing that the game was up.

“Then we will hurry on,” said the judge, grasping Roger’s arm the more firmly.

The amusement which all along had been vying with a more serious emotion all at once came to the surface, and Roger, feeling the clutch of the judge’s hand on his arm tightening as if it held something uncertain and fluttering, liable at any moment to take flight, threw back his head and laughed aloud, his

THE INVISIBLE BOND

voice dying down into something of the same mocking bitterness that Sibyl had heard in it when she proffered her invitation. An instant afterward he was quite grave again as he paused.

"I will come with pleasure, judge," he responded, as graciously as he knew how, adding, "but you must let me go in and put on my dinner coat."

The judge's little trot came to a halt. "Your dinner coat?" he inquired, most seriously, but with a slight twitching of the muscles about the mouth that brought Sibyl strangely to mind. "Well, I suppose," taking out his watch and regarding it critically, "I suppose I shall have to grant a humble request like that since it seems to be reasonable. It is now a quarter-past six. We dine at seven. I give you half an hour. But mind you —" and the judge's countenance was ferocious again though his eyes twinkled, "if I don't hear your steps at my front door at the end of it, I will send a special delegation after you, commanded to fetch you, though you should be in your shirt tail!"

It was dark as Roger went up the steps of the judge's mansion, and he had been surprised to see that the lights in the street and from the houses on either side shone upon a thin fall of snow that lay upon the young bluegrass and all the tender green of the newly

THE INVISIBLE BOND

resplendent earth like a bridal veil encircling a nereid's verdant hair. Since two o'clock the mercury had dropped twenty degrees, threatening a melancholy blight to the fruit trees now in full bloom and to the wheat fields. The flurry of snow and wind that had taken place while he was dressing had nearly subsided, and the night was likely to be clear and cold.

He was ushered into the library where a wood fire burned upon the hearth, and where the judge sat anxiously awaiting him, the evening paper spread out on his knee. But he had evidently not been reading it, the events of the present, however stirring, having only a mild interest for him in comparison with those of the past.

"Ah!" he cried, smiling, the flash of his white, even teeth giving a sudden brilliancy to his face as its thoughtfulness relaxed, "I am glad that I did not have to put my threat into execution; and it is always a wise man that submits gracefully to the inevitable. Have this chair, my boy, the night is cold."

"It is most unfortunately so," said Roger, sententially, as he took the proffered seat near the fire.

The judge's face at once grew serious. "Yes, the fruit will surely be killed," he remarked, "and I am afraid that many of the crops will suffer. Some of them are already far advanced, I am told."

The knob of the door turned softly and Sibyl entered

THE INVISIBLE BOND

in her creamy silk gown — all that was to be seen of her, that is, for she was almost hidden behind a great armful of pink and white blossoms out of which her fresh face peeped like the incarnation of the spring-time.

She stood a moment glancing from her father to his guest, giving to Roger a friendly nod that seemed to accept his presence as quite the most natural of occurrences, and that graciously extended her hospitality without rendering it at all pronounced; and then, with a little sorrowful shaking of the head and a soft sighing, she bent her cheek down to the snow-be-sprinkled sprays.

“I have been out in the garden, and I have brought back — these!” she exclaimed.

The judge came forward with anxiety. “So we perceive, my dear, so we perceive. I hope that my daughter hasn’t got her feet wet?”

She quickly crossed the room and began arranging the blooms in the tall vases on the pier-table, and she threw him a loving, sidelong glance over her shoulder.

“It is not your daughter you see before you; it is Niobe, weeping this time for the little dead children of the spring.”

“Well, my dear, she may have wept herself into a stone like the daughter of Tantalus, but ‘the April’s

THE INVISIBLE BOND

in her eyes,' 'the April's in her eyes,'" responded the judge, softly.

Roger wheeled a chair for her before the fire, and stood waiting while she lingered over her task, and the judge hovered about her like a fussy old woman with his inquiries. Had she had a cloak about her? Had she thought to protect her feet? Had she wound a scarf about her head? In his day he had never liked to see a woman in the night air without a scarf, he said; and in his opinion much athletics had made the modern young person far too daring of the elements.

She answered gaily, evading when she could not fully satisfy; and finally she came back and accepted Roger's proffered chair. As she sank into it and stretched out her prettily shod feet to the fire he saw that the soles of her shoes were quite damp.

"I really did forget," she whispered in friendly confidence and with a furtive glance toward the remote corner of the room.

"It is very evident," replied Roger, smiling, with his eyes on the little circle of vapor rising from her moist slippers. He was struggling manfully to be simple and self-forgetful, and there was that in her unconscious dignity and sweetness and delicate aloofness that compelled him to something like her serenity of spirit, though not wholly.

"And it was perfectly horrid of me," she confessed,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

contritely, "not only because it would worry him if he knew, but because it has always seemed to me to be quite too contemptible to be reckless with one's health. It is such an inexcusably unthinking thing to do — such an unnecessary hindering. And though the 'body at its best' may not far project the 'soul on its lone way,' still," — and over her face there fell a veil of seriousness shadowing its piquant playfulness, and her eyes wandered thoughtfully to the fire, "still, 'flesh helps soul,' and there is something magnificent in the assistance that it does give, don't you think there is?"

She was sitting in her father's high-backed Elizabethan chair, her smooth dark head resting against its carved spokes, her hands quietly folded in her lap; and something in her repose of attitude, and in the graceful folds of her soft silk gown shimmering in the firelight, gave to her an antique grace and picturesqueness that seemed to remove her like some beautiful old portrait from the fret and turmoil of a prosaic day. Yet she was most distinctly a product of the present.

"Don't you agree with me?" she asked, turning slowly toward him, her slim neck, rising out of the creamy lace of her bodice, all at once straightening as she raised herself slightly and looked him directly in the face. He was silent and she went on quickly.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Respect for the body, the right degree of respect, is one of the soundest theories, I think, that this age has evolved; and it is the engrafting of the Christian ideal upon the old pagan conception of the value of the physical." There was something strong and sweet and steady in the earnest tones.

He started. The words, chiming in so strangely with the train of thought that he had been constantly following up of late, came to him from her lips with an almost overwhelming significance; and it was as if one groping toward the light should suddenly feel his hand firmly grasped by another traveler, bound for the same goal, and surer of the way.

"I have been thinking about that recently," he said, presently, in a low voice. "It seems to me that you are right, and that it is a part of the great dominant idea of the twentieth century: the idea of solidarity, the idea of unity, which we are struggling toward in all the supreme relations of life — unity between the powers of man's being, unity of the race, unity of the human with the Divine."

She was studying him with pleased, sparkling eyes.

"Ah, how you have grown!" she cried, making the first personal reference that she had fallen into, and almost thanking him with the tones of her voice, something in her look and manner bringing with vivid distinctness before him the moonlight scene in the old

THE INVISIBLE BOND

garden nearly two years before. What a little mother she had been in her attitude toward him always!

He looked away and dropped the subject abruptly. In Roger's own mind there was one point he had neglected to mention, one thing that he had not dared to touch upon, and that was the unity between man and woman, thoughts of which in relation to his own situation had led him up to the more general ideas he had expressed.

But the next moment dinner was announced and the judge, lifting his white head from his papers, came forward in high good humor, prepared to show himself once more the most genial of hosts. His own table was the place where he always shone resplendent; and as the meal progressed, Roger glancing from time to time into his clear-cut patrician face, and noting the rare good looks that matched the rarer sparkle of wit, the exquisite courtesy that bespoke an old-world civilization, found it not difficult to recognize in him a descendant of the Jacques de la Fontaine, of whom King Henry of Navarre, uttering his accustomed oath, exclaimed on first beholding him, "Ventre St. Gris! he is the handsomest man in my kingdom!"

When the dessert was brought on there was a flash of pleasantry by means of which even Sibyl was for a moment deceived. The judge glanced down at the plate of strawberries that had just been set before him

THE INVISIBLE BOND

with a gravity that scarcely seemed assumed, studying it with curious interest.

"My dear, isn't there some mistake?" he inquired of Sibyl across the table.

The girl looked up quickly, her housewifely instincts roused to instant apprehension, and a little startled look crept into her blue eyes. She waited.

But the judge was still attentively regarding his plate.

"Something is wrong," he said, shaking his head quite solemnly.

The look of consternation on Sibyl's features deepened. Her father was behaving so strangely. Though the occasion was informal, still it scarcely seemed to her to justify such unconventionality as a direct reference to some blunder that had evidently been made either with regard to the fruit or in the manner of serving it. But the judge lifted his head and she caught the merry twinkle in his eye.

"I have given Roger my word that he should dine upon strawberries served in cut-glass that once belonged to your great-great-grandmother Elizabeth," he said.

Roger broke into laughter. "I release you, judge," he cried, immensely relieved. Once more Sibyl's face was a ripple of good-humor.

"Unfortunately," she commented, "my great-great-grandmother Elizabeth is not always so interesting a person to others as to myself. A few days ago I was

THE INVISIBLE BOND

calling Judith Beverley's attention to some quaint old silver salt-spoons. Shortly afterward I offered her some pound cake. She looked at it suspiciously; and then, before she would take any, she asked, 'Who made this pound cake — an ancestor?'"

And thus the subject was launched that led by such easy gradations to the history that there was small chance for the discussion of any other topic that evening. When they returned to the library Sibyl lighted the student's lamp on the table, and the beloved manuscript was brought forth. The three grouped themselves about the room, Sibyl with her embroidery on one side of the chimney-piece, Roger on the other, the judge sitting midway in the impassable space that separated them, like the calm presence of personified law holding ever before their eyes the scroll on which was written the stern reminder of the invisible bond. The wood fire merrily leaped and crackled on the hearth; the low, melodious voice sonorously rolled out the lengthy periods of the history; while outside the night grew stiller and colder, congealing into an icy shroud the snow that lay on the heart of every tender bud and bloom.

CHAPTER X

THE FATE OF FRANCIS WALLER

WHEN Roger came down the steps several hours later a white splendor swathed the grass and trees, and the earth was very beautiful in its frozen sleep, like some young dead thing arrayed in a robe of royalty. The moon was shining, but with a sort of hard, alien brilliancy, and hung merciless as destiny in the now cloudless sky. The pale, cold light, the "rapture of repose," the deathlike suggestion smote vaguely upon his senses as something personal to himself, and acutely in harmony with his present sufferings. As if Love, not his own, but that which might have been given him, lay slain and shrouded before his very eyes.

But he was almost blinded to the spectacle by the fierce tumult that beat within. And once outside the doorway, the long repression, which, with iron resolution he had been exercising, suddenly gave way, and his face grew haggard and desperate. The strain he had been undergoing since the time of that first meeting with Sibyl after her return had taxed his strong powers

THE INVISIBLE BOND

to their utmost capacity of endurance, until to-night, despite his seeming calm when with her, he knew that a climax had been reached, and that he must not, dared not, trust himself to see her once again.

The appalling realization that had swept down upon him on that morning as dumbly he looked into her eyes had burnt itself with a fiery brand into his heart and brain; and he knew that the hitherto boyish, poetic fancies he had had of her had surrendered to a feeling so deep, and enduring, and overmastering as to leave him, like Dante on beholding Beatrice, aghast in the presence of a deity stronger than he, who, coming, should rule over him.

For with him, as with Dante, Love was not to present himself in the guise of a roguish boy, but with masterful, full-grown strength, a "Lord of terrible aspect," before whom he could only bow in awestruck, dumb submission. It was adoration, the very white heat of passion; and this arousing in him — immediately after his solemn consecration of himself to principle — of an emotion so profound, and so irresistible, was but another instance of the temptation in the wilderness following hard upon the baptism of the spirit that comes to all high natures.

As he went out into the darkness, and made his way home, the subtle charm of her clinging to him still and thrilling him to the heart's center, her beauty of soul

FATE OF FRANCIS WALLER

and of mind and of body seemed all at once to pierce him like a spear; and suddenly with a low cry he stretched out his arms as to an invisible presence, and stood with bowed head as if waiting a response to his passionate inward call. In that instant there existed for him in all the universe only this girl, and in the whole gamut of emotions there sounded but a single note concentrated in the one mad longing to hold her in his arms, and to pour out his very soul to her in a transport of unhindered devotion.

For several moments he stood there — under the pitiless moon. But presently his expression changed abruptly. The light in his eyes faded. Despair had returned to him, and again he was conscious, in its inexorableness, of a situation that had come upon him like the slow and terrible working out of an old Greek tragedy whose end is sure, and whose beginning has started in human frailty. Then he entered the great, solitary abode he called his home, and turned his steps in the direction of the library.

A few embers still glowed on the hearth, and mechanically he threw on some pieces of wood, and flung himself into the chair by the table.

And it was here he was still sitting, rigid from cold and clean forespent, when the morning broke, and there was ushered in a day which, all unknown to himself, was to make his name a topic on many lips.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Mrs. Caldwell hurried up the steps of her home and on through the doorway with an agitation that expressed itself in such a spasmodic fluttering of her bright adornment, such a rustling of silken skirts and nodding of cerulean plumes, as to make her entrance resemble nothing so much as the sudden flight of a bluebird under excitement.

"Where is Mr. Caldwell, Millie?" she asked the trim young negress in muslin cap and apron who had come running to answer her impatient summons. "Oh, I see," she cried as her glance wandered to a tiny room a few steps beyond the second landing. "In just a moment, Tim," she called to the comfortable figure sitting with a book beside the window.

But the cheeriness was illy assumed, and it was with an increase of trepidation that she speedily swept her flounces up the remaining steps of the stairway and passed onward, not in the direction of her husband, but into her own bedroom, closing the door firmly behind her.

She glanced at the clock. She had been one of the last to leave the tea, and it was nearly seven. Tim would be wondering about dinner. But she was not quite ready for any sort of conversation with him yet, and she was, in truth, shaken to the very foundations of her being by something that had just been told her, something she dreaded inexpressibly to tell him.

FATE OF FRANCIS WALLER

Since that morning at the Beverleys when Judith had poured into her ear a tale that had sent her home more distinctly miserable than she recalled having been in all her life before, she had become self-conscious and disturbed, feeling the burden of her share of responsibility in relation to Roger's marriage to Marian a veritable albatross about her neck, while all prospect of the sort of satisfaction attained by the Ancient Mariner when rehearsing his woes to a somewhat unwilling Wedding Guest was denied her because of her everlastingly binding oath.

She had told Tim the facts, the shocking hideous facts, just as Judith had given them to her, but not until days afterwards when she saw that his curiosity with regard to the situation had been aroused; and she trembled at the recollection of the deep stirring of emotions the recital had called forth. That Tim secretly held her to some degree to blame had become a thought that tormented; and the idea had grown until at the bare suggestion of any reopening of the subject she found herself in imagination cowering before her husband like a culprit in the presence of an accuser. But finally she crossed the hall and entered the little room where he sat reading.

"What have you been up to in all that splendor?" he asked, as he hastened to adjust a cushion back of her head.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"A tea at the Beverleys."

"I'll be hanged if you don't look completely fagged out."

"I am a little tired."

He arranged the pillows a little more comfortably, making a cheerful grumbling as he did so.

"If there is one thing above another on God's green earth that is an unfathomable mystery to me, and that is likely to remain an unfathomable mystery to me, I suppose, to the end of the chapter, it is the needless torture you women inflict upon yourselves," he observed, as he returned to his chair.

She did not answer, and his big blonde face twinkled with amusement as he sat leaning his chin on his elbow, and watching her in a sort of quizzical, meditative fashion, of which, however, she appeared wholly unconscious.

"Tim," she said, abruptly, "Francis Waller and Marian were seen together in Europe. Not long ago one of his Cincinnati acquaintances met him in London. In a reckless moment he acknowledged everything one night when under the influence of some drug. The man told his wife, and she wrote the whole thing home to some one in Cincinnati, who, as it happened, had once or twice seen the two together during the time that Marian used to go there for music lessons. Then the story spread, and it soon reached here, and

FATE OF FRANCIS WALLER

after Judith knew it, it meant that every one would know it — until this afternoon at the tea it was the one thing talked about. Oh, Tim, isn't it just terrible for poor Roger?"

But she was deliberately temporizing. It was not that, just that, she had come to tell him; something held her back from the startling communication that a natural impulse would have led her to make known instantly, and it was a sort of morbid and desperate self-consciousness that made her eager first to discover whether he really did have any sort of blame for her.

Tim Caldwell's huge form stirred uneasily, and his honest, kindly features suddenly blackened ominously.

"Ada, I wish to God," he said, slowly and fervently, "that you had never married him off to that red-haired girl you had here."

She drew back as if he had struck her.

"Please do not say that I married him to her," she said, quickly, with trembling lips. She put out imploring hands, and waited piteously.

But he had risen. He walked over to the window, and she knew that his thoughts had returned to Waller, for between his clenched teeth she heard him mutter, "The hound! Great God, the hound!"

He stood looking out for an instant in the gathering darkness, his heavy brows knit. Suddenly he wheeled and looked her in the eyes, and something in the

THE INVISIBLE BOND

strange quietude of his voice made her blood run cold.

"Do you believe Roger knows that the man is Waller?" he demanded, sternly.

For an instant she hesitated, then she said in a barely audible tone:

"No; I am quite sure that he does not know "

"Why?" he insisted.

"Because I met him on my way home from the tea, and I—I talked with him—and I—I am sure, from something he—said—that he is wholly without suspicion."

She was shivering as from cold. There was that in his manner which filled her with actual terror, and after she had spoken there was a moment of intense suspense.

"No one could tell him such a thing," she supplemented, quickly.

Tim Caldwell stood perfectly still in the center of the room, and all at once he raised his arm and held it uplifted. He was deadly pale.

"Then, by God, I shall be the man to tell him!" he swore. "And if he's got one half the grit in him I give him credit for, there'll be a bullet in the brain of that dastardly cur before another ten days have passed!"

Ada Caldwell sank back among her cushions

FATE OF FRANCIS WALLER

quivering in every nerve, and with such a sense of awe of his profound feeling that for a moment she was completely forgetful of the climax of information that she was yet to make known to him.

In all the years of her married life she had never seen him in just the light in which he appeared to her at that moment. And whether she most shrank from him as one who, under conditions of such provocation as were those of his friend, would stain his hands with the blood of the man who had wronged him, or admired him for that tremendous, elementary power he had just displayed, and which in some vague way she realized was to be traced back to his great love for her, she was too overwrought clearly to decide.

When she spoke again her voice sounded hollow and sepulchral.

"Roger is spared from murder. I came to tell you —"

He suddenly turned and faced her inquiringly.

"Francis Waller has committed suicide from an overdose of morphine," she said. "The news has just reached here."

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH TWO PERSONS RECEIVE A SHOCK

MRS. CALDWELL was correct in supposing that Roger knew nothing of the part that Francis Waller had played in the destruction of his home; and but for the fact that Marian was never even remotely in his presence referred to by any one, Roger would have had little reason to suspect that rumor was at all concerned with her name. Tim Caldwell, it is true, meeting him on the street one day, had plied him with questions that he had found it hard to answer. But the honest, unsuspecting inquiries had been in a way even less trying to his proudly sensitive nature — though it had led to the avoidance of friends whom he greatly cared for — than was the tactful silence of others, which told him only too plainly that suspicion of the situation was rife.

Waller's tragic death had brought to mind the occasion on which he had last seen him more than a year and a half before; and the recollection was especially in his thoughts one beautiful afternoon several weeks

TWO PERSONS RECEIVE A SHOCK

later when he was returning by way of the interurban electric railway over the same road on which he and Marian had driven on the day when he had asked her to be his wife. Business had taken him to an adjoining town, and going he had been wholly occupied with the matter before him. But as he was returning, something in the riotous beauty of the exquisite stretch of bluegrass country through which he was passing flashed before his mental vision every detail of that other afternoon of such profound significance to himself; and once more, down the hill in the late summer sunset, a collie following at his heels, came the carefully dressed, stoutly built figure with the Vandyke beard; and once more he saw the eager fluttering of Marian's gauzy veil as she quickly lifted it on hearing who it was that was approaching.

Could it be that it was actually only a year and eight months since he sat listening to their badinage, a half-angry boy, chafing under the interview, and impatient to be done with it?

As the car passed the exact spot where the meeting with Waller had taken place, he raised himself and looked steadily out of the window. Everywhere there were the gracious signs of renewal, the activity of things animate and inanimate, that marks the coming of the springtide. Barns had been repainted, fences had been whitewashed, and men called merrily

THE INVISIBLE BOND

to one another across the freshly ploughed fields. It was an idyllic scene, an enchanting blending of greens and browns and misty purple hues; while far away in the horizon the eye wandered to a dim outline of mighty forest trees stretched like a protecting arm about the young growing things, and caught the parting rays of the April sun late lingering as if loath to leave the pregnant, gladsome earth.

With what exuberance of spirits, what ecstatic overflow of joy, he used to wake up to the consciousness of the return of spring, just as if within him too the sap were rising! He recalled that his mother at those times had sometimes likened him to a young colt as he would come bounding into her presence. How he used to delight to lure her into the woods, and when she attempted excuses, to carry her off forcibly into the sunshine! How long, great God, how long it was since he had felt and acted like that!

He had been away since noon, and James had had orders to bring whatever mail there should be at the office and put it on the table in his library.

On entering this room he looked about him. There were no letters. But lying on one of the books he had lately been reading, and in a conspicuous place on the table, there was a paper addressed to him.

He picked it up and opened it, with an incomprehensible sense of expectation, and immediately his

TWO PERSONS RECEIVE A SHOCK

eye fell upon the portion intended to attract his attention, being caught by the heavy ink marks that lined it up and down.

He read a sentence or two, and then suddenly paused. His glance leaped down the page and rested there, and he stood still as a stone. Every vestige of color had fled from his face. His eyes were wide with horror, and a heavy perspiration had gathered on his brow.

He waited a moment, and then once more he held the paper to the light, and read the notice through.

Five, ten minutes passed. Still he stood there, not moving, scarcely breathing. Every muscle seemed paralyzed; even his power to think had deserted him. He was completely stunned.

But all at once he was roused by the striking of the clock on the mantel. As one dazed he listened, counting the strokes. An instant afterward he crossed the room quickly and touched the bell. James appeared.

He turned as the negro entered and gave his orders in a low voice that sounded unfamiliar even to himself.

"Telephone to the C and O station and see if you can get a berth for me," he said, "and bring my steamer trunk down from the attic and pack it, and tell Aunt Daphne I must have dinner at once; I am leaving this evening for New York." And before the astonished James could recover himself sufficiently

THE INVISIBLE BOND

from the surprise of the announcement, Roger was hurrying to his room to complete the necessary arrangements attendant upon a most hastily planned departure.

It was about an hour and a half afterwards of the same evening that Judge Fontaine crossed the intervening space between his house and that of Roger Bolling and softly entered without ringing the doorbell. He made his way to the library, and stood midway in the room, giving an inquiring glance around as if he half demanded an apology for Roger's unexpected absence from the old portraits that calmly looked down on him from the walls.

He carried in his hand a very rare volume of early Kentucky history written in 1792 by Gilbert Imlay — "ever memorable," to quote the judge's own descriptive words, "as the lover of the beautiful but hapless Mary Wollstonecraft"; and with punctilious precaution he wished in person to return the book which he had borrowed, placing it with his own hands in the exact spot from which it had been taken.

Depositing the volume, he took the chair beside the table in which he supposed Roger had just been sitting. Mechanically he reached out a hand for something to read while he waited, and the first thing it fell upon was the newspaper that had dropped from Roger's trembling hands a little while before.

TWO PERSONS RECEIVE A SHOCK

He put on his glasses and began to read. It was a London newspaper he saw at once, and as his eye ran down the columns it was caught by the heavy ink marks about the notice which Roger's keener vision had instantly turned to.

The notice was headed, "Frightful Holocaust," and it was a description of the burning of a London theatre in which many lives were lost, including every member of the company that had been giving in it an afternoon performance of a light popular opera. The judge read the description through, caught against his will by something graphic and tersely dramatic in the relation of the gruesome details. All at once his face blanched. The paper fluttered from his hands, and with a smothered exclamation he sprang to his feet, staring helplessly about him.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed, snatching up the paper again and fixing his gaze upon it. "Great God, how horrible!"

He held the fluttering pages for some time in his hands, no longer seeing what was printed upon them. He was thinking intently, and gradually his bewilderment gave way to conviction. For there was a list of the dead mentioned, and in it one name, the first his glance had fallen upon, stood out as if written in letters of fire — the name of Marian Day.

Yet might there not be a doubt?

THE INVISIBLE BOND

The judge crossed the room quickly and touched the electric bell. It was a long time before there was any response, but finally shambling down the hall came Uncle Lish.

"I hearn you, jedge," he confessed, apologetically, as he stood bowing in the doorway, "but seem lak I is a slow mover dese days, an' Jeems he al'ays answers de bell whin he's heah, an' whin he ain' I des has to ax Daphne help me into my coat long o' de rheumatiz, an' arter I done got hit on I ain' ve'y peert an' spry. Lawd, Lawd, but dis wo'ld sho is full o' trouble."

"Where is Mr. Roger, Lish?" asked the judge, going straight to the point, being in no mood for generalities however incontrovertible.

The negro shook his head. "He ain' heah, jedge," he answered, sorrowfully. "Dis wo'ld sho is full o' trouble."

"How long has he been gone?"

"'Tain' long, jedge, he an' Jeems shot out de doo' an' dey wuz gone lak de win'. Hit sho is a fine thing to have a big strappin' nigger lak dat Jeems to wait on him, but de cun'l he knowed dat sense ain' al'ays in a pa'r o' legs, an' me an' Daphne moughty worritted. Daphne she have sparrehgrass soup, an' he ain' eat no more'n a spoonful, an' she have spring lam' an' mint sauce, an' he ain' eat no more'n a moufful, an' de rest o' dem things she cooked is a-settin' in de kitchen on de

TWO PERSONS RECEIVE A SHOCK

table now, a-lookin' reproachful. Yas, Lawd, de cun'l he knowed dat 'tain' no sense to go travelin' 'thout you got a bellyful, caze you sho is gwine git hongry on de way de ve'y time whin victuals ain' handy."

The judge meditated an instant before he put the next question.

"Did — did Mr. Roger leave any message?" he inquired, haltingly.

The old negro scratched his head. "Not as I knowed on, jedge," he replied, at length. "He come out to de kitchen, an' he shuk han's wid me an' Daphne, an' he tell us take keer o' ever'thing tell he come back, an' he say he don' know how long he gwine stay 'way, an' he lookin' moughty solemn. Me an' Daphne is takin' it powerful hard. De cun'l never did leave on sech short notice, leastways whin we-all got spring lam' an' young peas, an' cauliflower, an' —"

The judge waved his hand a trifle impatiently. The impropriety of further questioning had occurred to him, but the suspicion that had taken hold upon him constrained him to make still another inquiry. He straightened himself all at once.

"Elisha," he asked with an assumption of great dignity that somehow seemed to atone to his somewhat outraged sense of decorum, "did your young master happen to mention to what part of the world he was bound for?"

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"To Yurup, jedge," replied the old negro, promptly.
"Dis sho am a wo'ld o' trouble."

The judge started perceptibly. For a moment he stood thinking. Then he turned.

"Ah, to Europe," he commented, softly, as he reached for his hat and cane.

CHAPTER XII

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

It was midsummer before Roger returned from Europe. The investigation which he had crossed the ocean to make, and to which he had brought all the powers of his intellect and legal acumen, only confirmed the accuracy of the story in its entire hideousness of detail that had been given in the London newspaper. That Marian was a member of the opera company referred to, that not more than five minutes before the fire broke out she had been seen on the stage, and that she met her death in the terrible way described, with the rest of her associates whose charred and unrecognizable bodies had afterwards been recovered, seemed to him to be proved beyond the smallest possibility of doubt.

There was but one thing that still remained for him in mystery: the name of the man who had wronged him, whose shadow seemed ever hovering near — always beckoning yet always eluding, in a sort of grim and ghastly humorousness — as Roger went about his

THE INVISIBLE BOND

painful task of discovery. It was a subject which until then he had scarcely dared to allow his mind to dwell upon, lest it arouse in him that awful white heat of feeling before which a man stands affrighted even of himself. He had no suspicion beyond the surmise that had now and then flashed into his thought that it was probably some one she had known through her study of music in Cincinnati. Her subsequent short-lived career upon the stage had seemed to strengthen this conjecture. But he had not sought to know what she had told him it would be her supreme effort to conceal; and as he saw the curtain descend upon that last most tragic scene of a life that had been so desperate and so misguided, only a feeling of pity was left, and he was glad that the dark secret of her downfall was hidden from him, so that he might the more readily throw over his remembrance of her the kindly light of forgiveness. Where love is absent forgiveness to the offender is not difficult; and all along there had been less resentment toward her than bitterness toward the situation, the forces of which he himself had started into action. Now he saw in the fire that had destroyed the woman the symbolism of purification and of obliteration, so that the individual was swallowed up in the universal, and all that remained were the great broad principles of human tragedy.

In June he had sent to the Lexington newspapers a

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

brief notice of her death, but it was not until the last of July that he turned his face homeward. A profound weariness, almost an apathy, was upon him, and as he stood once more, untrammelled, free to make of his life the complete and splendid thing which in his early manhood he had dreamed it might be, he felt as an athlete might feel whose arms have been long bandaged, and to whom the removal of the straps and swathes means not a return of the old power and vigor, but a sense of well-nigh paralytic impotence.

He found the old town peacefully basking in the glory of the summer sunshine, and his friends going about their wonted tasks with the easy indifference and mild display of energies that the Southron is very apt to permit to himself from the time of the coming of the first warm days down until the autumn. Many persons were away, but there were enough remaining to give to the place that light and cheerful aspect that it always wore at this season, like a summer resort; and as Roger passed to and fro to his office he would often see sitting on broad vine-shaded verandas, or beneath wide-spreading trees, a whole family, and sometimes half a neighborhood, assembled, the men discoursing usually upon politics, and the women in their cool white draperies laughingly abetting them, or adroitly turning the conversation into other channels whenever it threatened to become either too dull or too violent.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Judge Fontaine and Sibyl were at Bar Harbor, and not expected to return, his servants told him, until the first of September.

He had been at home about a week when one day, coming back a little earlier than usual for luncheon, he wandered out into the garden and whistled for the dogs to come to him. They were lazy in appearing, and as he waited, his eyes slowly, and as if drawn thither by an irresistible magnet, traveled toward the little arched gateway midway in the osage orange hedge that opened into the judge's premises.

He stood quite still, looking steadily toward the tiny portal, his expression grave and undecided. Everywhere a noontide languor prevailed. Not a creature was stirring about his own place, and the judge's, he knew, would seem even more deserted, for the reason that even the care-taker was off for a holiday. The drowsy hum of bees mingling with the occasional call of a jay or a robin alone broke the delicious quietude. He crossed the yard and softly turned the knob of the gate. But he suddenly drew back and would not enter — as a soul might draw back trembling before the gates of paradise. As he paused irresolute, all at once from the honeysuckle bush near by the redbird that had built his nest there — the same that had broken in upon them with his piercing, full-throated melody on that April morning

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

when Roger and Sibyl met for the first time after her return — lifted up his voice and began to sing. He began softly, with only a few low, detached, intimately fervid notes, gradually waxing more and more ecstatic until the very air seemed weighted with his love-song as an oriental garden is weighted with perfume. Roger listened with a dull wistfulness in his eyes. Then, as the song died away, a light overspread his features, and with an end of hesitation he turned the knob and entered. From that moment new life awoke in him.

Sibyl's presence pervaded every nook and corner of the garden, and was the supreme essence of its sweetness. She was a part of its dazzling sunlight and of its cool, deep shadows, its tender, maternal solace, its evanescent maiden charm. From every leaf and flower she spoke to him, with every sigh of the summer wind she comforted him. So near did she seem to him there that as he made his way to the bench under the great tree beneath which they had sat on that farewell evening of her dance, he half paused to listen to the soft trailing of her ethereal garments as she followed him to the place, while once more the moonlight was gleaming on her bare, beautiful neck and arms, and her haunting voice was sounding in his ears. Ah, that voice! How often in his dreams since then had he heard it, floating down to him in his slumbers like the soft whisper of a magic

THE INVISIBLE BOND

flute! How waking he had striven to put the memory of it from him, lest like the siren voice of old it lure him to the death of all those hardly-won principles of life which he had wrested from each fierce battle of the soul as his superb spoils of victory! And as he sat there, realizing her, gloating over her, absorbing her into his very being, the wheel of time turned backward, and the last two miserable, despairing years seemed for an instant to vanish, and again he was the undaunted, untired youth of that enchanted summer night.

But it was only for an instant. Like a returning wave the recollection of all the circumstances relating to his unhappy marriage bore down upon him and overwhelmed him; and with a groan he buried his face in his hands, and shut out the vision from him. How could he hope to win her now, he asked himself in bitterness of spirit, after all that had come between? For with him, as it has ever been with every true lover under the sun, doubt went hand in hand with hope.

Yet from that time on he gave himself up wholly to the luxury of dreaming of her, thus feeling in the mere release of conscience with regard to her a joy that was only a little short of actual possession. Often in the clear, still midsummer dawns he would wake and think of her, always seeing her face as it looked to him on that never to be forgotten night in the

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

moonlight; for behind the veil of simple friendliness she had worn in their recent meetings he had not been able to find her, though again and again her voice had seemed to him to echo her little farewell speech. "Be a good boy," she had said to him, as she held his hands in hers, and every word and every look she had given him since her return seemed intended but as a supplement to it, and as a divine uplift in the midst of a dismal wreckage.

There was not at this season of the year the usual amount of business requiring his attention, and he fell into the habit of coming home to luncheon earlier than heretofore that he might spend a quiet hour in her garden, alone with her in that mysterious life of the spirit which with him had come to be so much more real than the actual that he could scarcely persuade himself that her very bodily presence also had not been conjured to appear before him when he would awake from this day dream and go back into the world of commonplace again.

The courthouse clock was just sounding the hour of twelve one day, the loud, resonant peals echoing far and wide through the old town, when he went up the steps of his home. In a sudden great longing for her he had laid aside his work and returned a whole hour sooner than ordinarily, and as he strode through the hall he smiled a little to himself at the encroachment

THE INVISIBLE BOND

his indulgence had allowed. But he was far from repentant, and five minutes later he was lying outstretched on the grass beside the bench in Sibyl's shadowy garden with his eyes closed, beholding her, hearing her, adoring her, with that marvelous capacity for conceiving an experience that certain finely organized beings possess, and that has in it the element of pure poetry where there is a great love coupled with a great humility.

So absorbed was he in his own thoughts, so far removed from the distant hum of the little city wherein men walked oppressed with sordid care, that he had lost all sense of time; and he scarcely knew whether he had been there a long or a short while when suddenly he opened his eyes and saw her standing before him. For an instant he gazed at her bewildered, as if he still half believed her to be but the lovely phantom of his dreams. Then with a low, joyful exclamation he sprang to his feet.

She had been standing within two or three feet of him, looking down upon him, and she had evidently thought that he was sleeping, for her expression altered quickly when he opened his eyes. But in the flash of that swift transition he had caught a look upon the beautiful face that he was not able to interpret.

"Oh, but I didn't mean to wake you!" she cried. "I came on tiptoe, and as softly as a cat. Did you

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

ever notice how a cat walks when going through long grass? And you never would have known I was here if a spool hadn't fallen out of my work-basket."

She wore a pink cotton gown, and she carried in the crook of one arm a little white and gold basket filled to overflowing, one dainty bit of embroidery overcrowding silks and needles and certain odds and ends of lace and ribbons which had found their way into the small receptacle.

"You didn't wake me," he answered, gravely, "and you — you only materialized."

He took the hand she held out to him, asking himself if she guessed even a little of what the moment meant to him — the wonder of it; and he tried to make his voice sound natural, and was conscious that he had failed utterly. He suddenly looked away.

She had quietly seated herself on the bench and was spreading out her embroidery.

"When — when did you come?" he faltered again, turning to her with that dazed, half comprehending look his face had worn when he first opened his eyes and beheld her, and could not know whether she was a creature of flesh and blood or an illusion born merely of the intensity of his own emotion.

"We came last night," she answered, "quite unexpectedly. It was cold at Bar Harbor, and we both longed for home." Then she added, quickly, with a

THE INVISIBLE BOND

soft, indulgent smile around, "Did you ever see such a wild tangle as my garden? It has quite outgrown itself — like a great unkempt school-boy, and I can scarcely keep from scolding it just a wee bit for such uppishness."

He did not speak, but he flung himself down to the ground at her feet, and presently he reached out and gathered a handful of the long grasses that her gown had swept in passing. He appeared to be studying them intently, but in reality he was only asking himself a question, and that was how in the name of all that was reasonable he was going to keep himself within bounds of cool propriety when his heart was leaping in a madness of joy within him, and when he scarcely trusted himself to look at her for fear he should spring up and snatch her into his arms.

But in spite of her sweet and gracious cordiality there was about her a fine reserve not easy to break down, and one realized that she was a woman whose resources of polish and wit and ease were such that a complete grasp of any situation in which she might be placed would be hers. That it was her intention to show him the same simple friendliness, the same freedom from constraint that she had steadfastly maintained in their recent previous meetings, he well knew — but he was conscious of an alteration. She was not less friendly, but she was strangely different. He felt

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

it in the very tones of her voice and in the delicate atmosphere of aloofness that was about her.

All at once a sudden sharp foreboding pierced him like a sword thrust. If some other man had won what his whole being cried out for! The thought was one to set his brain on fire and drive him headlong, through a swift impetuosity of feeling, to rashness of expression, in order that at once he might know the worst. Yet something in her manner held him back.

He glanced quickly toward her. She was in the act of threading her needle, and there lay spread out in her lap a circular piece of damask on which were embroidered some half a dozen fern leaves in a shade of green that well simulated the natural colors. In her perfect serenity she both soothed and baffled him. If she had been sitting there in this simple fashion with him at her feet every day for weeks or months, or years, she could scarcely have seemed more at home with him. And yet he dared not speak one word of the great love that was clamoring so loudly for utterance. In the violence of the sudden apprehension that had shaken him lest too late to win her his freedom had come to him, his sense of delicacy in regard to the situation was for the moment swallowed up, and man-like he was rendered desperate and alive only to the thought of alleviating his uncertainty.

Her little work-basket was on the bench beside her,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

and to conceal his agitation he reached out for it, and bent his head down over it, fingering its dainty contents. In the bottom of the basket his hands, still trembling, touched a tiny book.

"What have you here?" he asked, looking up at her. "May I look at it?"

She nodded, smiling, and he drew it forth with that sense of intimate discovery in relation to the person beloved that a lover feels in regard to the most trifling thing thus unexpectedly come upon.

"Oh!" he cried, delighted, with uncontrollable fervor in his voice and a half-shy glance at her, "do you love it too? How strange! — I have just been reading it."

His face was lit with a sudden boyish enthusiasm, and he held the little book in his hands an instant without opening it. It was the Andrew Lang translation of the old thirteenth-century *cantefable* — the quaint tale told in alternate prose and verse by the "captive gray," of the immortal loves of Aucassin and Nicolette.

He slowly turned the pages. "How young it makes me feel again!" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "I don't believe I have seen the original once since my university days, yet it is as fresh with me as if I had read it only yesterday; and this has brought back so many delicious memories: long moonlit strolls with Bernard de Ventadour, and Pierre Vidal, and above all 'the

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

old captive' — and the sound of viols and the laughter of lovely ladies leaning from their casements — as together we wandered from castle to castle in 'the happy poplar land.' I surely was a troubadour of the troubadours, in those days," he ended, with a sudden gravity.

She leaned toward him with that curious commingling of archness and seriousness that was one of the distinct marks of her personality, and that gave to it its most peculiar charm, quoting lightly, yet with a note of sadness:

When I was young as you are young,
When lutes were touched, and songs were sung,
And love lamps in the window hung.

"But we are not very old yet," he said, quickly, and appealingly.

She threw him a laughing, piquant glance. "I am nearly twenty-five," she remarked, naïvely.

"And I am nearly thirty," he responded, very quietly.

He was silent a moment. "It must have been rather rough on the *viel caitif* to think that it was all over with him," he said, musingly, a light coming into his eyes that gave to his features a very different aspect from what they wore in the ordinary rough-and-tumble intercourse of life. And then, as she flushed a little, he added, meaningly — "That would be a hard thing for any man."

THE INVISIBLE BOND

"Yet he tells the tale, as his translator suggests, of his dear provençal lovers," she responded, with something like embarrassed haste, "as if love were so long past with him that he could think of the loss of it without bitterness and even with a sort of humorous patience."

She seemed to him to be deliberately ignoring everything in his manner that veered toward the personal, and he was hurt and troubled. He held the book thoughtfully as his gaze wandered away for an instant.

"There was not much 'humorous patience' about the loves of Aucassin and Nicolette," he said, at length, a trifle bitterly. "Theirs was a love so deep and terrible that nothing could thwart it, and nothing could alter it; and that is the reason why for more than six hundred years the story has lived, and will continue to live as long as there are any true lovers left in the world."

Her cheeks had flushed a deeper pink and her violet eyes were lowered. But there was a small flickering smile about her lips as she bent over her embroidery.

"Read a little to me," she said, softly.

And then Roger turned the pages and read of how old Count Garin de Biaucaire was hard pressed of his enemy and besieged by an army of a hundred knights and ten thousand men at arms, horsemen and footmen;

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

and of how young Aucassin, the count's son, Aucassin of the yellow hair and blue and laughing eyes, refused to be dubbed knight, or to mount steed, or to go into the "stour where knights do smite and are smitten," unless they give him Nicolete, his sweet lady, so suddenly overtaken was he of Love, who, according to his ancient chronicler, "is a great master."

He paused a moment, and Sibyl looked up. Her eyes did not meet his but traveled on to a small patch of sunshine in the distance, made particularly luminous by contrast with the near-by all-encompassing shadows.

"If Aucassin had been my lover," she said, "I think I should have loved him even a little more, and have believed that he loved me even a little more, if he had gone bravely about his knightly duties."

His eyes kindled with warmth and gratitude. "Should you?" he asked, quickly, "should you?"

But Sibyl would not answer. Roger fingered the pages with hands that suddenly trembled again.

"You will have to admit," he said, after a moment, "that when he did go into battle at last on the covenant that, if God should bring him back sound and safe, he should see her long enough to have of her 'two words or three, and one kiss,' that he hacked and slew a plenty, though at first he was so filled with the thought of her that he even forgot where he was and

THE INVISIBLE BOND

what he had to do; and I don't wonder," he added, with one of his old whimsical youthful smiles, and the insistent personal note.

"I should have loved him even a little more, and have believed that he loved me even a little more, if he had felt he must go, though there was little prospect of the 'two words or three, and one kiss,'" she answered, bending lower over her work.

"I believe you would," he replied in a low, tense voice. "I knew — I have always known you would."

Then softly, as if the antique love-song were a thing that had been written solely for him, Roger read the lament of the imprisoned Aucassin as he poured out his soul in broken-hearted longing:

"My sweet lady, lily white,
Sweet thy footfall, sweet thine eyes,
And the mirth of thy replies.
Sweet thy laughter, sweet thy face,
Sweet thy lips, and sweet thy brow,
And the touch of thine embrace.
Who but doth in thee delight?
I for love of thee am bound
In this dungeon under ground,
All for loving thee must lie
Here where loud on thee I cry,
Here for loving thee must die
For thee, my love."

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

With a quick little gesture she dropped her embroidery, and bent down above him, reading from the same page whereon his gaze still lingered.

"And it is so beautiful here," she cried, "where she makes her escape from the palace upper chamber, 'painted wondrously with colors of a far countrie,' and goes to the ruined tower in which Aucassin is confined.

"'Aucassin was cast in prison,' she read, 'as ye have heard tell, and Nicolete, of her part, was in the chamber. Now it was summer time, in the month of May, when days are warm, and long, and clear, and the nights still and serene. Nicolete lay one night on her bed, and saw the moon shine clear through a window, yea, and heard the nightingale sing in the garden, so she minded her of Aucassin her lover whom she loved so well.'"

"And she had only to mind herself of him," he interrupted, darting a swift glance into her eyes, "to be willing to undertake a most desperate and daring thing for his sake. Could a woman love as much as that still, I wonder?"

"Yes — and more." The words fell from her lips more like a soft, quick breathing than actual speech. But an instant afterward she had picked up her embroidery and seemed intent only upon her centerpiece.

"Read about the lodge of boughs in the forest," she

THE INVISIBLE BOND

said, "where she waits for Aucassin, after he has been taken out of prison."

For an instant he looked steadily at her. Could there be a hidden meaning lurking in the seeming simplicity of those words? The thought filled him with a joy as wild and piercing as ever thrilled the heart of Aucassin. He too had been imprisoned, ah, yes! — and freed again, thank God! Was she like Nicolette, a-waiting him at the place "where seven roads meet"? His pulses were bounding furiously. He dared not look at her now. All the deep and desperate passion of the antique tale, all its pathos and poetry, its sweetness and fidelity, seemed to him to live once more in immortal freshness through the mighty love he bore her, which, he knew, was but a new manifestation of an old, perennial force, still existent, still vital, in spite of all our twentieth-century convention. Obediently he turned the pages, reading snatches here and there, bringing before them the perfect picture — the gloom of the ancient forest, with its perils of wild beast and of the darkness, the flash of the spring sunlight, the singing of birds, and the splash of the fountain; and then the description of the meeting with the shepherd boys, with its delicious note of drollery, so quaint and real that one seems to hear, as Walter Pater says of it, "the faint, far-off laughter still." Then he closed the book, reciting dreamily:

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

“Where smooth the Southern waters run
Through rustling leagues of poplars gray,
Beneath a veiled soft Southern sun,
We wandered out of yesterday;
Went Maying in that ancient May
Whose fallen flowers are fragrant yet,
And lingered by the fountain spray
With Aucassin and Nicolette.”

“I am so glad you stopped there,” she said, presently, letting her embroidery fall into her lap, and sitting with her hands clasped, looking away into the distance with a certain sweetly grave, wistful look in her eyes that he had often seen there, and that always seemed to him to be seeking to penetrate so much further into the mysteries than most persons ever care to go. “To me the story always ends with the meeting between the two under the quiet stars in the ‘lodge of green.’”

“Yet it is something to know that the old tale arrives at last at the completest of human fulfilments, don’t you think it is, in spite of all the trials that followed even after he had found her?”

His voice sounded a trifle unsteady, and he raised himself and sat looking at her with eager, shining eyes.

Something in his look, his manner, finding her for an instant off-guard seemed to shake her self-control. There was a little break in her voice when she spoke.

“The trials only made them love each other the more; I didn’t quite mean that.”

THE INVISIBLE BOND

“You meant —?”

He reached over with one hand for the upper round of the bench and drew himself quite close to her. “You meant —?” he repeated, devouring her with his eyes, as he looked up into her face, ardently, yet reverently, as a man might gaze at a star, “won’t you tell me what you meant?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Oh, but I do so much want to know. I wish you would tell me.”

There came a slight coldness into her voice, and she looked away from him.

“I only meant that — that in having found each other after realizing all that each was willing to undergo for the other, they had the most perfect fulfilment already, and that nothing else that could possibly happen afterwards to either of them could make any difference whatever.”

The words were intensely passionate, yet the tone was formal. She had suddenly paled, and she drew back from his nearness with something like a protest and a reminder.

Hurt and uncertain he moved away a little, and lay resting his chin on his elbow, thinking hard. He was beginning to believe that in all she had said to him there was an underlying symbolism of which the tale had merely offered opportunity; and out of the

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

chaos of thought and feeling that followed upon a sudden sharp conviction that all at once took possession of him, only one thing stood out with overwhelmingly startling significance, and that was that she was a woman in love — but not with him. That under all her fineness and delicacy there were tremendous powers of feeling intensified by the exquisite purity of her nature, and that, though the spiritual element prevailed in her to the exclusion of everything that characterized the grosser order of being, she was “yet human at the red ripe of the heart,” he had not doubted for an instant. He knew that if she loved a man she would love him with a tenderness and an abandon that would have its root in a depth of feeling that could endure all things, and that would be as deathless as the love they had just been reading about. And that she did love some one in just that way, he now believed.

Up to this moment the thought had been suspicion merely — now it had become certainty. He could not have given any clear and satisfactory reason for this conclusion. Yet he was quite sure.

He lay perfectly still, as still as if the stroke that had felled him had been straight between the eyes, bringing immediate unconsciousness; and the whole earth grew dark, and his face reflected his anguish in a sort of dull red that overspread his features as from a physical blow.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Several moments passed. He did not once speak, and he seemed to be even forgetful of her presence, wrapped in the profound isolation that follows upon a great grief.

She sat watching him, motionless, silent, yet with her eyes riveted upon his face, and with an expression that wavered and then grew definite. And by and by as she gazed upon him lying dumb and stricken at her feet, his strong young frame in its momentary helplessness making the appeal which defeated manhood that has gone down nobly ever makes to the woman who is by nature intensely womanly, there swept over her features a great tenderness that drove the barriers she had set up headlong before it as a mighty torrent beats down bridge and parapet.

She made a slight movement, and he turned. A low cry broke from him, for the look in her eyes was the same, only this time deeper, surer, and more infinite, as that, wondering, he had seen in them when she had stood looking down upon him believing him to be sleeping.

He started to spring to his feet, then another impulse superseded the first one, and kneeling, he reached out his hands and clasped hers lying folded in her lap, and bent down his head upon them. "Oh, Sibyl — Sibyl!" he said, and then there was a silence between

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

them while she could hear the deep breaths that shook him like sobs.

All at once he raised his head and looked into her eyes, as if seeking still further reassurance. But as he reached out his arms to her, she put them from her. Then leaning over him until her warm breath swept his brow she softly spoke the words that made all things clear to him. "Not yet," she whispered, "not yet — dear, some day!" And an instant afterwards she was gone.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GODS ARE JUST

As day by day and week by week there came to him a surer knowledge that she loved him, the wonder of the thing grew with his increase of certainty. Every hour that he spent with her but revealed her in some new light that appealed to his heart or his imagination; and in exploring those secret and marvelous depths wherein, like a jewel hidden from common sight, a woman's soul lies sleeping, awaiting the discoverer, there awoke in him, with the great overmastering love which from that time on possessed him with a force that was startling even to himself, such a sense of her sweetness and normalness, and largeness of attitude toward life, that he felt himself gradually being led up to heights which thus far he had only dimly discerned as distant mountain peaks, heights of thought as well as of feeling. For she had pondered much in that aloneness of the spirit which both her love for him — begun as he now knew before he had ever seen or heard of Marian — and the

THE GODS ARE JUST

peculiar circumstances of her life had engendered; so that she was, in a far broader sense than most persons are able to be, an inspiration as well as a woman profoundly adored. There was in her nature a perfect adjustment between its dual parts that enabled her to respond to the healthful humanness of his devotion for her, yet there was a serenity also that supplied a fine ballast to his native impetuosity.

He wanted to be married at once — the next month, the next week even, as he half laughing, yet with an eagerness that was in part serious, demanded, for after the revelation in the garden he forced the climax, and she was no longer able to resist him. But on the point of an early marriage she was firm, and for the sake of convention it was finally agreed that the wedding should not take place until the following April, and that their engagement should be kept secret from every one save her father.

With the coming of the autumn and the awakening of the old town to renewed business activity and to the sort of spasmodic social revival that is its nearest attempt at gaiety, Roger suffered a pang or two. She was not greatly interested, he knew, in the things that made up the life of the average girl about her, and yet it was by no means with entire satisfaction that he saw one or another young man of his acquaintance attempting to bear her off quite before his eyes,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

and all with that lofty air of proprietorship which seemed to him to be commendable in one alone. He well knew that he had little to fear from any of them, and that she was divinely his. He trusted her to the very utmost, for he was sure that fickleness did not form even a little part of her character. Yet he wanted her all for himself; and he would have liked to devise some sort of bower of seclusion for her in which she should exist solely for him (with perhaps a word or two daily with her father, as a great concession) and where no other man might ever dare to penetrate to gaze upon her loveliness upon penalty of death.

But this was a very minor grievance, and he had no other. How gloriously, how preeminently happy he was! And what a dreamer! Life led by way of a secret, winding, golden stairway straight up to the palace of the stars — those silent, brooding stars that so often had seemed to mock him. Now they were so kind; and God was in His heaven, and the world was swinging along at such a mad, delicious gait that, with that swift surrender to new conditions and to the intensity of the present which is a characteristic of persons of his temperament, he felt himself to be removed by centuries from the past and all the horror that he had but recently passed through. Not that the marks of his suffering were not upon him still. There were times when Sibyl's eyes would fill with

THE GODS ARE JUST

tears as she would sit studying him when he was unconscious of her scrutiny, for the furrows, outward as well as inward, wrought by woe were too deep to vanish speedily. Yet he was young enough, through the medium of a great joy, to recover much of his lost enthusiasm. Thus the autumn passed and the first months of the winter.

In February he was called to New York on an errand of business. His consideration had been asked of an offer for a piece of property in a once worthless part of the city which half a century before his grandfather had taken in part payment of a bad debt, never expecting to realize more than a pittance out of it. The property had become valuable, and as a result of his visit he was returning home at the end of a week the wealthier by more than a hundred thousand dollars. Everything seemed coming his way.

When the train rolled into the familiar station back of the Phoenix Hotel at Lexington, he was standing on the platform, and he was the first man to descend from it. His face was eagerly joyous, and he strode along up the street past the hurrying crowd of travelers and the shrieks of omnibus drivers and cabmen with such vigor of step, such splendor of health and hope in his whole being, that strangers passing now and then turned to throw a second glance at the slim, elegant young figure, with its air of kindliness and of

THE INVISIBLE BOND

distinction. It was half-past five, and a chilling, dismal, rainy afternoon. A driving wind blew particles of ice and snow into his face and the ground was becoming slippery. At the corner he boarded a car, remaining standing, however, outside, in order that he might get off the quicker. The sleet was clinging to his overcoat and his face was stung by the keen little arrows that flew with every gust; but he was unconscious of everything save that in five or ten minutes more he should be looking into the eyes of the woman he loved.

As he sprang from the car in front of his home a graceful figure in a long blue cloak, holding an umbrella slightly downward to break the force of the wind, darted past the gateway. It was quite dark, and the girl was evidently disturbed at being out so late, for she hurried with the fleetness of a deer onward. He had not even a glimpse of her face, but something in her gait and aspect made his heart leap.

He stood an instant uncertain, looking after her. Then a light overspread his features. There could be no mistaking that spirited outline and movement. With an exultant smile and a sudden bounding of the pulses he sped after her.

But at the sound of his footsteps, that gained every instant, and evidently with intention, upon her, the girl only walked the faster, and he had not succeeded in overtaking her until, with a little troubled glance

THE GODS ARE JUST

around, she had reached her own gate, and was fumbling a trifle nervously with the latch. Then she turned her head, and before she could speak or move he had dropped his umbrella and his valise, grasped with one hand the umbrella she held, and with the other had clasped her close, while his kisses fell hot and fast on the lovely upturned face.

"Well, of all the impudence!" he exclaimed when he raised his head at last, "running away from me like that!"

"Do hold the umbrella a little lower, dear. Think how horrible it would be if any one should see us! There!"

She was trembling from the unexpected joy of seeing him, and there was a little tearful catch in her voice, part of fright and part of happiness.

"If I hold it any lower I shall surely have to kiss you again," he threatened; "it will be only a natural consequence. Now tell me what you ran away from me for. You ought to have known it was I. I couldn't be near you and not know it."

"I wasn't running away from you — I was running away from a highway robber, and I was clutching my poor little pocket-book that has just three cents in it tightly. It was because I found when I opened it that it was three cents instead of five that I had to walk."

He bent over her, and there came a great tenderness

THE INVISIBLE BOND

into his eyes. "Well," he said, gravely, at length, "you were running from a highway robber, after all, a robber that demands the sweetest and most precious thing that ever passed down any highway since the world began."

Then he reached down and picked up his belongings, and opened the gate for her, and together they passed through, walking slowly under the one umbrella, and as unmindful of the cold and sleet as if it were the balmiest day of May.

"I wasn't looking for you this evening," said Sibyl, presently, and with a sort of hush in her voice as if she stood just a little in awe of her own happiness and so must treat it reverently. "Your letters said always Wednesday."

"I know," he answered, "but by hurrying about like mad and forcing those fellows to terms I was able to gain a good twenty-four hours, and I knew what those twenty-four hours would mean to us, for already I felt as if I had been gone a year. Sometimes I almost hated that money for taking me away from you."

"The money?" she asked, vaguely. Then she dropped his arm and broke into a laugh as they reached the steps. "Oh," she cried, "I had forgotten all about the money. So you sold the property, did you? Somehow I can't care an earthly thing about it—

THE GODS ARE JUST

not as much as I ought to care really, for together we should be able to do so much good with it. What did they give you?"

"One hundred and three thousand dollars," he answered, simply.

She walked slowly up the steps, deliberating. When they had reached the top she stood a moment looking deep into his eyes. "And I wouldn't give," she said, very quietly at length, "one of the letters you sent me while you were gone for the last cent of it — to say nothing of your valentine. Who taught you to be such a poet — the birds out in my garden?"

His arms were about her again and his heart was beating wildly under the deep feeling that her impassioned words awoke. "Yes — and *you!* Sweet-heart, did you actually miss me as much as your letters said?" he demanded, low under his breath; and then, before she could answer him, a sudden tremor seized him. "Dearest," he whispered, "do you realize that it is just six weeks from to-day before the first of April?"

She would not reply for a moment, and though he felt the start she gave at his words as he held her firmly, when she spoke it was with a shy, womanly parrying.

"The first of April?" she said, with a soft, teasing laughter. "What on earth is going to happen on

THE INVISIBLE BOND

the first of April?" It is the day for all sorts of silly pranks. Have you any particular one in prospect?"

"Then we shall be married on the second if you are superstitious. I have a mind above such weakness."

"On Sunday?" She was still laughing slyly to herself at his seriousness. "That will be the second of April."

"On Saturday, then. You said the first of April."

All at once she reached up her arms and drew his face down to hers, clasping it in both her hands, while her eyes searched deep into those furthestmost recesses where none but her had ever wandered — the sacred penetralia of the soul. Then, with a long-drawn breath of satisfaction, as if she had found there nothing to trouble, nothing to frighten her, she said, solemnly, and with a little nestling movement against his shoulder, "Dear, it shall be when you wish; and whether that be on Saturday, or Sunday, or Monday, it will be my day of days; and I give you myself, all of me, every heart throb, every brain throb, every high impulse, every true aspiration, my hopes, and my dreams, my sorrows and my tears — all, body, mind, and spirit, I give to you, now, and forever and ever."

He could not speak. Moved to the very heart's center, he could find no words with which to voice the emotion stirring within him. A mist gathered in his eyes, and he bowed his head in a silence that was

THE GODS ARE JUST

rapt and reverential. No other moment of his acquaintance with her was so sacred or so beautiful — not even the moment of their betrothal, and he was able to see in it all its deep and touching significance: the completeness of her surrender, the exquisite trust and tenderness with which she relinquished her girlhood and in anticipation already sought to enter upon the larger womanhood to which his love had summoned her. As he held her thus in his arms, from his heart there went up the purest prayer his lips had ever uttered for grace to be worthy of her, that together they might go onward in that existence of the spirit of which he had had the clearest revelation through her, and that he might have her with him all the days of his life. And then, as a sudden terror of loss, that ever-present foreboding, the reminder of man's mortality, intruded, as it does inevitably when happiness seems surest, a wave of passionate fear swept over him and he strained her almost fiercely to his heart. "My love — my love!" he whispered, fervently, "God keep you, and give you to me always!" and releasing her, he turned quickly and disappeared in the darkness.

He had dined and was sitting in his library glancing over the stack of letters on the table, the accumulation of the ten days' absence, when the shock came. He had just read the last letter, and was feeling a sense of

THE INVISIBLE BOND

relief on getting through with all of them, being eager to return to Sibyl, when James entered with a telegram.

He took the little yellow envelope into his hand with a careless jest over his shoulder, and then as the servant left the room, still smiling, and thinking of Sibyl, he tore it open. He read these words:

“GRAND HOTEL, Cincinnati, Ohio, February 15.

“I am ill and desperate. I need you. Don't refuse. Come to me.

“MARIAN.”

He sat for a few moments, staring with a sort of sinister gleam in his eyes, clutching the thin sheet of paper in his hand, and with the smile on his features suddenly become frozen and ghastly. All at once he sprang up, standing tall and still in the center of the room. Then with a slow and courteous questioning his gaze wandered from one to another of the old portraits on the walls. A piece of wood on the fire rolled out on the hearth, and he carefully reached for the tongs and readjusted it, lingering about the task. Then he returned to the great high-backed chair in which his grandfather used to sit, and suddenly he threw back his head, and a harsh, discordant laughter echoed through the room. “Alive — alive — ha, alive!” he kept muttering to himself like a half-crazed old man under his breath. “But there was some mistake,”

THE GODS ARE JUST

and once more that terrible, hideous laughter rang out—a laughter to curdle the blood in one's veins—and that strange muttering began again, "a mistake, yes, a mistake! Marian was dead, burned, burned to a crisp in the London theater. How horrible to hear one's flesh sizzling like a crackling! But Marian was dead, quite dead, dead as a door-nail, whatever that might be. Oh, yes, he knew; he had once looked up the phrase in a dictionary. He liked to run things down till he knew all about them. Excellent habit, of course. Gives a man a sort of fund to draw on when he needs it. Once in court—"

He stopped short. What—what was it that had happened? He could not think except in short, disjointed sentences, and the last thought would drive out the one that preceded it, so that he was confused and troubled, and piteous in his helplessness. A strange indifference was stealing over him. He sprang up again and began to move up and down the room in order to fight off the lethargy. But it was necessary that he should consider—something was required of him, a decision, action. His eyes fell on the telegram spread out on the table. He paused. With every tick of the clock its meaning became clearer. Slowly his brain returned to its normal action; and as the full purport penetrated him of this last blow, the thought of Sibyl came bearing down upon him like an avalanche,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

and he lifted his arm and swore, "I *will* not — by Heaven, I will not give her up!"

And this solemn, defiant determination was the one thing his mind would dwell upon. He would not be checkmated in the game of life. He would not be made a prisoner when a way of escape was still open to him. He would get a divorce. The law of God and man would give him the freedom he craved. His whole being rose up in rebellion against the insult his destiny seemed to be offering to him, and he refused to take any but the natural, elementary view by which most men similarly situated would have been controlled. Gone now was the strong, sure grasp upon the larger things of life to which through suffering and the slow process of evolution he had seemed to reach as a result of that highest stage in personal development which is attained at last through the workings of the mysterious trinity — the physical, then the physical united to the mental, and finally the harmonious blending of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual.

Step by step he went over from the beginning the various degrees that marked his acquaintance with the woman who had brought only woe and disgrace and desolation upon him, and who now in this last daring revelation of herself seemed but to complete the tragedy whose forces had been set in motion on the day when he asked her to be his wife. Then his thoughts turned

THE GODS ARE JUST

to the mistaken idea of honor that had held him to a compact which could only be fulfilled by the breaking of a higher law, the law that forbids a loveless marriage; and like one running a race with conscience he hurried on into that perplexed period that followed upon her desertion of him when the moral sense within him, rendered more acute by the profundity of his sorrows, compelled him finally to wave the individual privilege that would have given him back his freedom for the sake of the obligation he felt toward society — an obligation that had forbidden him to seek for a divorce, in view of present evils.

But though he had passed speedily out of the first stage — the stage of the physical, until his great love for Sibyl was allowed to blossom into the perfect flower it was, he was simply developed as yet toward the mental, his attitude in relation to the situation being purely an intellectual one, and his point of view that of a conventional morality. Up to that time he had been able to discern the sanctity of the marriage bond, but not in its deepest meaning the sanctity of the marriage relation; and this last conception, which had belonged to the third stage — the dawn of the spiritual — the coming of Sibyl — had rushed upon him in all its sweetness and vastness of significance with the love of her, and then for the first time he had apprehended in its fulness that a marriage contract does not make

THE INVISIBLE BOND

a marriage, and that the sanctity and purity of the relation depend upon the attitude of soul of the two persons concerned in it.

Day by day this conception had strengthened through the spiritual soundness of the love that existed between himself and Sibyl. Soul and sense were one through the right of a mutual harmony of being; and to-night, in his excruciating agony and bitterness, he cried out in rebellion against the stern Nemesis that had tracked him up to the very verge of his happiness. By subtle sophistries he sought to deceive himself into the belief that the still face confronting him was not the face of retributive justice; and he thought of his duty to Sibyl. How could he — what right would he now have, even if he wished it — But he could not yet even consider the torture of giving her up. He would free himself, and then he would come back to her, and then —

But Sibyl? What would be her answer to all this? He dared not think. Yet gradually as he grappled with this, the hardest problem that had ever confronted him, there came a strange stillness to his pulses, a stillness as of death, and his face blanched. Somehow, somehow, the problem had solved itself! For the trait of impetuosity which was on the surface most pronounced in his composition was really temperamental and not a part of his character. His dominating characteristic was an impulse toward

THE GODS ARE JUST

truth and honor, else he would have sunk rather than risen in the midst of the circumstances in which he had become entangled; and he saw — as see all thoughtful persons who are in harmony with the ideas of this great era we belong to, an era of scientific enlightenment and yet of highest spiritual development — that God works in and through his own natural laws, that he does not sit afar off in the heavens and arbitrarily punish those who do not honor him with obedience. For God who is love manifests the perfection of his love through the steadfastness of his laws, and he realized that the tragedy that had come upon him was a direct consequence of his own sin — just as all tragedy is the result of sin of a more or less vital nature working surely to its own logical ends.

The temptation he had yielded to on the afternoon of that fatal drive with Marian would have seemed to some men a small one to set in motion the relentless wheels of tragedy, yet to Roger, accustomed to probe deeper than most into fundamental principles, knowing that when the normal, healthful feelings of life are perverted or defied the forces of tragedy are inevitably aroused, the recognition now came with a profound awe and self-abasement that the gods are just and of our pleasant vices make instruments to scourge us. He bowed his head.

Slowly the moments sank into hours. The wood

THE INVISIBLE BOND

fire on the hearth burned low. And so alone with the reality of Sin, Roger came face to face with the mysteries, and learned that greatest of truths which the process of time has unfolded to man — "All's love, yet all's law." While uplifting him, comforting him, there came to his soul something of the sublime and lovely vision which in these lines Browning attributes to the young David when, seeking to drive out the evil spirit from Saul, he mounts to a clear apprehension of the uses of life:

"And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet."

CHAPTER XIV

ROGER AND SIBYL

HE was aroused finally by the large clock on the stairway sounding the hour of eleven, the slow, full strokes echoing hollowly through the silent house, and falling upon his ear like a solemn summons to duty. He started up and looked around him with a sort of dull wonderment in his eyes, just as if he were returning at the end of a lifetime, old, and broken, and weary, and half expected to see in material things also some manifestation answering to the change within himself. That but little more than three hours before he had entered that room in all the gracious floodtide of youth and love seemed a thing past belief; and it was with a grim sense of approbation that his glance fell upon the charred bits of wood lying amid heaps of ashes on the hearth, and he realized that the last spark of fire had died out, and that the room had grown as cold and vault-like as if it were in reality the tomb it symbolized. For here he had buried all his joy, and with it his youth forever.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Presently he rose and crossed the room a trifle stiffly, feeling a chill and heaviness upon him that robbed his movements of their usual aliveness. He drew back the window curtains. The lights still burned in his neighbor's house. His gaze traveled from the library, where doubtless the judge sat absorbed in the history, to the little room beyond, which Sibyl had had fitted up as her own particular abode, only a very favored few ever being received in it, and in which her lovely presence had always seemed to him to shine like a jewel in its proper setting. Was she there now — still waiting for him, in the soft glow from shaded lights, with her books or her embroidery, or better still her own thoughts?

Then he came back into the center of the room. For a moment he stood in deep thought, with bowed head, and hands tightly clenched, as if meditating the hard, immediate plunge his brain proposed. All at once he reached for the telegram on the table, and an instant afterward the hall door opened and closed softly, and he passed out into the night.

He went round the corner of the house, crossed quickly the intervening space, and approached the judge's house by the rear. The servants were still laughing and talking in the kitchen, and from that he concluded that the final securing of bolts and locks for the night had possibly not yet been accomplished.

ROGER AND SIBYL

He hoped that the little glass door at the end of the hall that led by a flight of steps into the garden had been overlooked. He turned the knob. The door yielded, and he entered the dimly lighted passage.

It was but a few steps to her door, yet his feet dragged so slowly that the short distance seemed lengthened into furlongs. Even with his hand on the panel he hesitated. Should he tell her to-night? Might they not have five or ten flawless moments together, the shadow driven back and defied, the agony of the past three hours forgotten? For a moment he grappled with his temptation — the longing to hold her, unsuspecting of the blight that had fallen upon their young love, close, ever closer in his arms, to stifle her with his kisses when wondering, but never doubting, she should seek to know the reason for his long delay in coming, to feel again the warmth and sweetness of her caress, the exquisite yielding of her whole being to his. Then his features grew stern and resolute. A pallor followed upon the momentary glow. He knocked softly.

As in a dream he heard her low voice bidding him to enter, and as one who moves scarcely of his own volition he came into the room and stood tall and still beside her.

She was sitting with her hands clasped in her lap in a chair drawn up quite close to the fire, and her expression

THE INVISIBLE BOND

was rapt and thoughtful, luminous in that tender effulgence that shines like a glory about a woman's face when alone she gives herself up to unrestrained adoration of the man she loves. All her soul was in her eyes, and in her whole attitude there was the peace and poise that suggest a nature profoundly womanly and profoundly strong. As if conscious of the light that had but lately been upon it, she kept her face averted and, supposing him to be a servant, without turning her head she gave some simple household direction.

But something in the stillness of the near-by figure wrought strangely upon her senses. She looked up quickly, and at the first glimpse of him she uttered a low, glad cry and sprang to her feet. An instant afterward her face changed, and the color in her cheeks fled. She reached forth startled, appealing arms, and then, as he neither moved nor spoke, her eyes grew wide with horror, and with a wild entreaty became riveted on his face. She could not get her breath, and her knees were trembling. She grasped the back of the chair and waited. Her lips moved, but some trance-like spell held her, and she was unable to speak a word. And then, her vague terror becoming definite, all at once she started toward the doorway.

"My father!" she gasped.

But he intercepted her progress, moving quickly

ROGER AND SIBYL

toward the door, and standing with his back against it.

"It is not your father," he said in a voice that fell strangely on her ear. "I have no bad news to bring you of him, thank God. What I have come to tell you concerns myself — and you — and one other."

The tone was as still and as aloof as if every vestige of feeling had died in him, and if one could imagine a corpse speaking it would be with some such dull and lifeless accent.

Helpless, she stood searching his white, cold face. She took a step nearer.

"What—*what* is it?" she whispered, huskily. "Oh, dear, dearest, can't you see that you are breaking my heart?"

Up to that moment he had kept his eyes determinedly from her, but at the ring of torture that sounded in her words, he turned a swift, pitiful glance upon her, and a sudden shiver swept through him. But in a moment he had steeled himself again; and with the change in him there came also a change in her.

She saw the tremendous effort at restraint he was putting upon himself, the tenseness of muscle, the death-like calm. Concealing her own agitation by a superb summoning of composure, she wheeled a chair for him up before the fire, and as soothingly as if she were speaking to a little troubled child asked him to

THE INVISIBLE BOND

sit down. She was smiling softly when she seated herself in a low chair beside him, and there was in her manner a complete ignoring of all evil — just as if there were in his love for her such a mighty shield, such an all-encircling and sure defense, it was not possible for her really to fear anything. She leaned toward him and with her eyes still searching his face rested her clasped hands on his knee. Once more her face was serene and very beautiful in its perfect trustfulness.

“Now, dear, what is it?” she asked.

At her touch he drew back as if she had struck him, and his frame shook as from an ague. His eyes met hers for an instant, and turned miserably toward the fire. He could not speak. Her hand closed softly over his. “Dear,” she whispered, “*dear!*”

But he shook himself almost roughly free from her, and pushed his chair away.

She looked up inexpressibly startled. Had she been a woman with a shade less of pride she would have suffered acutely under his repulse. But her self-respect was of a kind to sustain her though the shock was great. Mute and spellbound her eyes still searched his face, finding no answer.

He still sat wrapped in that strange, impenetrable gloom from which no word nor caress of hers could rouse him, his face haggard and drawn, his eyes glassy

ROGER AND SIBYL

and unseeing, while his whole personality seemed to be slowly receding from her. She thought of him as he had been but a few hours before — as he had been in those impassioned, boyish letters he had sent her from New York, when, no matter what he had set out to say, he was very apt to end every other sentence with the repetition “I love you — I love you!” How those three words had leaped and flashed over the closely written pages until the entire letter seemed aflame with them! “Darling, I have never been away from you for one hour — I *love* you!” he had said in the last one, “I take you with me everywhere. I see you — I hear you — I hold you in my arms — I Love You!” resorting at last to capitals through an evident mistrust of anything less emphatic to express him. How irresistibly fascinating he had been!

She gave a sudden gasp, and her face paled. But she sat perfectly still, waiting until he should speak. A sort of wide patience and comprehension rendered her very quiet, but she was suffering intensely again, and as his eyes returned once more to hers, a stifled groan broke from him. Then, turning his face away that he might not see the desolation that he was about to make, without a word he handed her the telegram.

In silence she took it into her hands. In silence she read it. For the space of several minutes the little room was as noiseless as a crypt. He could not bring

THE INVISIBLE BOND

himself to look at her, dreading the effect of the blight upon her soft loveliness, and feeling himself as powerless and as despairing as a bankrupt husbandman in the presence of the devastating forces that are destined to destroy his harvest. No sweeter flower of hope had ever blossomed for any man, and just as his hand was reaching for the perfect fruit — with a sudden madness in the brain he sprang up and began to pace up and down the narrow space of the apartment. Finally he paused, and at last with an effort turned toward her.

A swift alarm pierced him like a spear. Had she fainted, he asked himself quickly, as he knelt beside her. Her head was resting against the back of the chair and her eyes were closed. One arm hung limply at her side, and the telegram had fallen from her hand and had caught in the flounce of lace on her skirt. Every vestige of color had retreated from her face, and she was like marble in her whiteness and stillness. He grasped her hand. It was cold as the hand of the dead. She did not seem to breathe.

“Sibyl, for God’s sake speak to me!” he cried, “speak to me!”

For an instant she did not stir, and in a panic he bent over her. Then a long-drawn sigh like the quivering and shudder of an aspen when the wind passes over it shook her, and slowly the waxen lids were raised. She did not move, and with her head still

ROGER AND SIBYL

leaning against the back of the chair her eyes rested on his agonized face. A moment freighted with eternity passed.

"You—you will go to her," she said, at length, still studying him with a concentration of scrutiny to which all her vital powers seemed to lend themselves.

He bowed his head and rose. But his lips were sealed.

She searched his face with desperate eagerness. Once more it was unrevealing as granite. Her breath came ragged and torn. She was trembling from head to foot.

"You will go to her?" she repeated, with a sob in her voice and a frantic questioning in her eyes.

He paused, helpless, before her. Then he looked quickly away.

He had begun that dreary march up and down the room again, but at her words he came to a sudden halt.

"I must go to her," he assented, dully.

She leaned quickly forward. The pallor had left her face, but a dark, peculiar brilliancy shone in the violet eyes, and there was in her aspect something strange and almost supernatural that made his heart stand still.

"You — will — take her back?" The low, hesitating, but thrillingly persuasive voice fell upon his ear, baffling and terrifying him as to her meaning.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

Once more she looked deep, deep, with that same strained intensity of gaze, into his eyes, to be met this time by a desperate answering inquiry.

Then he started and came and stood beside her chair; and presently, as if some marvelous light had suddenly shone within her, revealing the soul back of the lovely flesh, his expression changed. His features relaxed, softened, and a calm that was almost majestic in its simplicity seemed to rest upon him. Again their eyes met, and at last he understood.

"I must take her back," he responded, very softly, "and may God give me grace to do His will!"

Her lips moved as in prayer, and a great stillness wrapped her round about as she bowed her head. All at once she rose and held herself at her full height. A new pride and dignity were all about her, and on her face there was a look of exaltation; for the assurance she had sought had been borne in upon her, and she knew now that alone he had climbed to that great height from which together, like disembodied spirits, they might look down and survey a mutual sacrifice. Never had he seemed to belong to her so absolutely as in that moment of relinquishment. Never had his love for her, sweet as it had been to her, seemed so much the perfect thing she now knew it to be. A sort of holy joy possessed her, that lifted her away from every thought of the loneliness and sorrow to which

ROGER AND SIBYL

his decision consigned them both, and set her upon a mountain of transfiguration—the sublime summit from which the pure in heart survey the cross afar and obtain heavenly consolation.

Throughout that mad whirl of thought and feeling that followed upon chaos, one thing alone stood out after the first delirium of pain caused by his communication had a little subsided—a great longing that he should not fail; and it was characteristic of her in her supreme moment that all other consideration should sink into insignificance beside the hope that he should prove himself faithful to the high standard he had set up, and thus add one more hero to the world. Every impulse leading toward his unhappy marriage she understood and long ago had pardoned as only the nobler and purer order of woman can understand and pardon; every call of honor that had compelled him to yoke his life with one whose inherent nature could only be in continual antagonism to his own; every motive of lofty sacrifice that had constrained him to endure a bondage from which he might have been free, had not a sense of obligation toward his fellows nerved him bravely to endure; every thought and every heart throb that had swayed him she had read as one reads an open page, and in approval, and reverence, and profound devotion her spirit had bowed before the being large enough to do what he had done. But

THE INVISIBLE BOND

under this last test his character had been subjected to a fiercer heat than that which surrounds a metal in a crucible, and she had waited, breathless.

She stood beside him now in an awed silence for a moment, and then she came a step nearer and he could feel the soft fluttering of her breath against his cheek as he bent down his head to her. "Dear, it is the end," she said in a voice whose sweetness pierced him through and through, "the end of all our beautiful dreams, of all our blissful hours of love. But oh, believe, try to believe that the best of fulfilment already has been ours. Let nothing rob you of that peace. And I — I will never forget. Every morning when I wake and look up into the sky and see the same sun shining that made the earth glorious for us, I shall think of you, and I shall know that God's blessing is still resting on the world, and that it is for both of us as well as for every tiny blade of grass. And the stars and the moon will tell me that too, and I shall hear it in every breeze; and it will make me strong to wait until He shall give you back to me. The time may not be long. If not in this life, then in some other we shall surely be everything to each other again. Oh, dear, dearest, do not look at me like that!"

She had been smiling bravely up at him through her tears, but at sight of the agony in his eyes she

ROGER AND SIBYL

suddenly broke off and put up piteous, imploring hands. He caught them and crushed them in his, and half frightened she drew back from him, tremulous and thrilled. A warm crimson swept to her brow, receded, and left her very pale.

"Please go — go quickly," she whispered, huskily.

For an instant he hesitated, then curbing the mighty wave of passion that swept over him, he dropped her hands and moved away from her. His face was lined and worn under the stress of the terrible struggle he had passed through, and his hands shook. He stood with bowed head before her. But presently he came back to her side, and she saw that he was calm.

"Good-by," he said, brokenly, yet with a courage that rose to meet her own, "good-by. Nothing — nothing can really separate us. Through this life and through all eternity I am yours. These arms that have held you shall hold no other, and the lips that yours have touched shall be sacred to you forever. It may be a lifetime to wait — it may be but a matter of a few years. Long or short it will find me the same, unchanged and unchangeable — waiting, always waiting."

And then as he took her icy hands in his for an instant, he bent down his lips to them. "God help us, my beloved!" he said. And when she raised her eyes he was gone.

CHAPTER XV

THE STOOP OF THE SOUL

A FEBRUARY sun was struggling to pierce the somber heaviness that overhung the Cincinnati streets as Roger went up the steps of the Grand Hotel on the following morning. It was eleven o'clock, and he had but a few moments before arrived. There had been no dallying with his resolution, and with a steadfastness of conviction that differentiated him widely from many of his type he was without misgivings, though more miserable than most men could endure to be and live. His face was white and set, but he walked with a firm, sure step — the step with which nobles marched to the guillotine and in all ages the heroic have moved forward to their doom, hearing ever above earth's clamor the sound of martial music. He had not long to wait, and in less than a quarter of an hour after entering the hotel he was being directed down a long corridor by an attendant who finally paused before a doorway with the laconic remark, "This is the room, sir."

THE STOOP OF THE SOUL

He knocked, and a voice within responded faintly. He opened the door, closed it softly behind him, and stood only a step beyond the threshold, his eye sweeping the shadowy apartment with a swift, inquiring gaze.

The room was in the characteristic disarray which he always associated with Marian, and which, even before he had discovered her sitting in a large chair near the window brought her vividly before him. At his entrance, she made a feeble attempt to rise, and then, as if the effort were too much for her, sank back languidly among her cushions, leaning quickly forward the next instant and watching his face with a timid, burning look in her eyes. He saw her and came forward. But as his gaze took in the full details of her appearance, he checked an involuntary exclamation, and something like horror — horror tinged with pity — traced itself upon his features.

In silence he stood before her, shocked beyond measure and almost mistrustful of his senses. That the altered being before him was really Marian seemed a thing incredible. Every hint of the voluptuous beauty that had been hers had vanished; gone were the tints of rose and pearl, the exquisitely molded form, all the soft allurements of the flesh, and instead a woman bowed and broken, old before her time, and emaciated to a mere shadow, looked up at him out of deep, cavernous eyes whose utter misery she made no effort to

THE INVISIBLE BOND

conceal. Presently she shivered, and drew the fur cape she wore over her loose white wool gown a little closer about her. She broke into a hollow, bitter sort of laugh that fell upon his ears as discordant as would seem the sound of merriment echoing from a charnel-house.

"Perhaps I should have warned you," she said; "ghosts are somewhat disconcerting."

"You have been — you are still desperately ill," he responded, lamely, keeping his eyes in an unwilling stare riveted upon her face.

She shrugged her shoulders and turned away a trifle petulantly.

"Sit down, please." She motioned to a chair opposite her, and he took it mechanically. For several moments she leaned back and closed her eyes as if unconscious of his presence, pushing away with one hand the thin, fading strands about her temples, where the hair had once grown thick and tawny as a lion's mane. With a sense of merciful protection, the desire to shield her from even his own scrutiny, he looked away, and as he did so his glance wandered from the costly fur she wore to the confusion of articles on her dressing-table, some of them very rare and beautiful, and finally rested upon the luxurious bits of feminine apparel scattered here and there which in her carelessness she had neglected to put away. His

THE STOOP OF THE SOUL

brows contracted under the acuteness of his pain and humiliation, and he sat looking down at the ground waiting for her to speak, but himself unable to utter a word. She opened her eyes.

"I am ill," she said, as if she were assenting immediately to his comment, "and dying, I believe." Her voice was as indifferent and as lifeless as if she were uttering some inanity about the weather or the most tiresome and self-evident of platitudes. "That is why I sent for you. I have a strange thing to propose. I want you —" All at once she broke into that same low, bitter, repellent laughter, "I want you to make 'an honest woman' of me again."

He looked up quickly and his face paled.

"It is not in my power to do that."

She leaned toward him with feverish intensity. Her breath came in short gasps. He could see that she was shivering from head to foot, and that she hung upon his answer in a frenzy of apprehension.

"It is in your power to take me back, isn't it? I am asking you to do that. You — you are not married?"

The muscles about his mouth hardened. He felt her eyes fixed upon him with a lynx-like penetration.

"I am not married," he said, at length.

He would not look at her, but he heard the quick sigh of relief she gave at his words and was conscious

THE INVISIBLE BOND

of the complete relaxation of muscles with which she received his assurance.

She toyed with the silken tassel that hung from the heavy cord at her waist.

"I cannot explain this strange longing I have for respectability," she observed. "It is new with me, and I cannot account for it unless it is something that is universal and that at times every person feels. I used not to. Don't you remember that I told you once that I loathed the ethical? It was perfectly true. I think I could dare to live my life out in a steady defiance of morality, as long as I should be strong and beautiful and death did not threaten — the sort of defiance I mean, of course, that I have been guilty of. I don't mean" — she looked away, and a faint color crept into her thin cheeks — "I don't mean evil in the usual, degraded sense. A great love always dignifies license. There was never any one but him. I don't know that I can make you understand. No one who has not loved as I loved could understand. It was a madness, a fire unquenchable, and before it principle became only a puny thing to be swept down at the very first blast. I know it all sounds horrible to you, but that is only because you have never loved. Let the flame be hot enough, and one person will act precisely as another person; and we are all in one boat, and there's no pilot at the helm," recalling one of Waller's

THE STOOP OF THE SOUL

speeches, and turning her face suddenly away from him.

He made no effort to combat her with arguments, and presently she began again. The faint glow had faded quickly from her face. Her voice was an old woman's voice, querulous and very wearied.

"I don't know why, caring as little as I do for a respectable living, I should care so much for a respectable dying. It may be fear — superstition, perhaps. But I do. I prefer to die under the shelter of your protection, your name. It is a good deal to ask, and with most men such a request would be worse than useless. I doubt that there is more than one man in a hundred thousand, wronged as you have been, who would listen to such an appeal for an instant. I believe you are the hundred thousandth. That is why I sent for you. But before you decide anything let me ask you this question: If the case were reversed and you had wronged me as I have wronged you, and you came and asked me to take you back again, wouldn't you expect me to do it?"

"Doubtless I should."

"Isn't it what every other man would expect?"

"I suppose it is."

"And haven't I heard you say that you believed that there should be the same standard of morality for men as for women?"

THE INVISIBLE BOND

He acknowledged it. She rose and drew back the curtain a little, and then she pulled her chair a little nearer to him and fixed her eyes on his face. The light fell full upon it. She studied him closely.

"You too have changed," she remarked, quietly. "You look many years older — almost as if you had really suffered. I wonder if you have. They say it is only irrational suffering that ages; the rest simply beautifies. At least you have not yet grown ugly as I have. Does vanity ever die in a woman? How it hurts me that you should see me like this! I had never meant that you should see me again. When I sent you the London newspaper —"

"Did you send me that paper?" he broke in, harshly. She looked him in the eyes.

"I did. I meant to die to you forever. I wanted to give you back your freedom. I was in the mood to make atonement, for he had just died, and nothing, nothing on earth made any difference to me personally any more."

"Then he is dead!" he exclaimed, quickly, turning his shamed and haggard face toward her once more.

She looked at him wonderingly for an instant, as if she half believed him to be suddenly bereft of his senses. Her lips parted in the old way, and her breath came quickly in little fluttering gasps as it did always when she was under any sort of excitement. All at

THE STOOP OF THE SOUL

once a swift illumination overspread her features. She quickly dropped her eyes. Then he didn't know. Her story, that all his and Waller's world must be familiar with, in some way had eluded him. A savage elation took possession of her, and she hugged her joy to her breast. It was almost as if in that moment Waller were given back to her.

"Yes, he is dead," she replied, softly.

She rose and fumbled again with the window curtain, but as Roger stood beside her, she motioned him to be seated, coming back to her chair, having made the room shadowy again.

"I sent you the paper," she said in a cold, perfectly callous voice, but with something of the old insolent defiance of opinion, as she studied him narrowly from under her half-closed eyelids. "It was strictly true that I was dead; and if it was not an actual, outward fire that had consumed me, but an inward one, what mattered it? I was dead. I wanted to be dead, and I meant to show you one kindness, just one; and the way to do that seemed to be the way I took. I meant, I hope you will believe me, I meant to be dead to you forever. I thought I could keep to that position, and that practically it would be just the same as if the newspaper account were a correct one. I think I could have kept to it if my health had not failed, and this horrible feeling had not grasped me and made me a

THE INVISIBLE BOND

poor cringing thing eager to make some sort of compromise with decency at the approach of death."

He did not answer for a moment, and when he spoke his voice almost startled him by its strangeness. It seemed a thing incredible that he should be thus quietly sitting there listening to such a recital from the woman who had been — great God! — who still was his wife. The roar of the city down below, the faint February sunlight struggling in at the windows, the picturesque disorder of the hotel bed-chamber with its oppressive aroma of luxury — contributed more by her own belongings than by its appointments — were like things seen and heard in that half-sleeping, half-waking state that is the torment of the victim of fever. It was only with a great effort he was able to rouse himself and put the question to her which out of the confusion of thought that beset him forced itself for no particular reason to the front.

"Was there — some other person —" he halted and began again. "One of the names mentioned in the list that the newspaper gave was Marian Day."

She inclined her head slightly. "I was the Marian Day referred to. You thought that it was possibly the name of some other unfortunate?"

He bowed.

"I am trying to understand what you have to tell me," he answered, stiffly and formally, his nerves all

THE STOOP OF THE SOUL

on edge from the strain she was keeping him under. "Please remember that I am wholly in the dark."

She leaned back in her chair and whisked the silken tassel lightly.

"It is all very simple. I was a member of that particular opera company. After we went abroad we both decided that for many reasons it was best that I should go on the stage. He —" she hesitated an instant and looked away — "was able to secure a position for me by means of influence that he brought to bear. Wealth is apt to be all-powerful. He spared no effort. I had been singing in the company for several weeks or more on the afternoon when the fire occurred. I was a sad failure. I lacked the necessary training, and I couldn't act at all. My voice was only mediocre, after all, it seems, though it was a surprise to me to make that discovery."

"Why did you wish to go on the stage?"

Roger put the inquiry shortly, as if every word were drawn from him against his will.

She stirred a trifle uneasily. "I have just told you. Both of us thought it best."

"Was it his suggestion or yours?" he persisted, sternly, with his eyes on her face.

She evaded.

"I always wanted to go on the stage. I was glad of the opportunity at last. I still believe that I would

THE INVISIBLE BOND

have succeeded if — if I had not been so much occupied — with him. I could no more sing on the days when he was out of humor than the birds can when the clouds are gathering, unless the little startled cries they give can be called singing. My voice was like that — all fearful, and harsh, and uncertain. The manager was disappointed and indignant. He raved and threatened. But at times I was able to do better. The sun would shine, and then my voice was not such a bad voice and I was applauded and people overlooked my clumsy acting. One day my sun set never to rise again.”

She paled a little, but she spoke without a tremor, and began again quickly.

“The next week after his death I went back to the theater. But it was no use. On the morning of the day of the fire I had a violent altercation with the manager. He hinted that after the night’s performance he intended to break with me. I determined to forestall him, and I made my arrangements speedily. My things were packed and sent to the station. That afternoon when I went to the theater I had with me all the money I possessed and all my jewels. I meant to leave as soon as the opera was over for Paris. I sang wretchedly. Once I encountered him at one of the wings. He spoke roughly. I went to my dressing-room and an impulse seized me. The performance

THE STOOP OF THE SOUL

was only half over, but why, I thought, should I submit to his insolence any longer? I did not stop to think. In two minutes I was down the stairs and out in the street, feeling the cool air against my cheek and walking like some one escaped from a madhouse."

A sudden grayness gathered about her lips and he looked at her in alarm. He started up.

"Don't talk any more now if it disturbs you so," he commanded, gently.

She waved him back. Her manner had grown suddenly wild and strained, and something of the desperation of the time she was describing seemed to awake in her and urge her to a sort of breathless haste.

"Let me go on."

He sat down.

"I had gone but a few yards when I was startled by hearing shrieks and hurrying steps in the direction of the theater. A frantic, groaning, surging crowd swept past me, and in an instant it seemed the air was filled with hideous, terrifying sounds, and pandemonium was let loose on every side. Then I knew that the theater was on fire. I sat down on a doorstep and waited. I was faint and ill. Suddenly I closed my eyes. I don't know how long I sat there, but when I came to myself it was getting dusk, and the streets were a little quieter. I heard two men talking as they passed. They were speaking of the number of lives

THE INVISIBLE BOND

that were lost — an appalling number, including every member, they said, of the opera company.”

Once more he sprang to his feet.

“Shall I get you a glass of water?” he asked, in a low, anxious voice.

She shook her head. “I staggered to my feet and drew down my veil. A strange feeling was over me. I was dead — and yet not dead. I could still feel the earth under my feet, the wind against my cheek, and yet — every member of the opera company was burned — the men had said it, and they had just come from the theater, and they knew. I had lived through a week of torture, the first week without him, but now I felt almost joy again. It was bliss to be dead — to be wiped out of existence just as if I was a bit of wood or flimsy stage scenery. I was grateful to the merciful fire that had destroyed me. Half an hour later I was on my way to Paris. On the day following I sent you the newspaper.”

He looked at her and his face hardened.

“It was inconceivably wrong and cruel,” he said.

“But if I had never come back?”

She watched his face with a certain low cunning that he shrank from perceptibly. He rose and began to walk up and down the room, and her eyes followed him. Her lips were smiling. Suspicion was becoming verified.

THE STOOP OF THE SOUL

"I need never have come," she remarked, presently. "He left me quite comfortable. It was because of — of the feeling I told you of. I never dreamed that I could feel like that. When I sent you the paper I was quite sure of myself. But when I came out of the long illness I had I was changed. Death had looked me in the eyes, and I knew that from that time on he would be close at my side."

All at once she looked up into his face with a ghastly attempt at the old audacious coquetry that had once helped to ensnare him, the words making a shocking accompaniment to her ill-timed levity. She held her head lightly to one side.

"After all it may not be for more than a month or two, and then — then you can go back to her — to Sibyl Fontaine."

He came and stood before her, and something in his face made her quail. The smile on her lips suddenly became a contortion. She put up her hands imploringly, growing deathlike in her grayness, and trembling violently. It had been only a random shot, but she knew that it had hit the mark.

"Have you decided?" she breathed rather than asked.

"I have decided," he answered.

"Then you are going to renounce me?"

He did not speak, and a panic seized her and drove

THE INVISIBLE BOND

her headlong. She stared him uncertainly in the eyes for an instant, and all at once she flung out her arms and sank on her knees before him. The cheap melodrama that the act suggested was belied by the abject terror in her looks, her voice. For once in her relation with him she was genuine. Her words came tearing upon each other like overleaping flames, hot with the haste of desperation.

"I am ill," she whispered, huskily, "dying as you can see. There is not one chance in a hundred for me. All the physicians say that. My doom has been pronounced. It is some heart trouble that is incurable. Death will relieve you of me soon, if only you will do the thing I ask. I know it is a terrible sacrifice I ask you to make. But oh, for God's sake try to make it. I — I cannot die in any sort of peace unless you take me back! Oh, Roger, be merciful. I don't ask you to forgive me, because I don't regret anything. I would do it all over again. I loved him. I love him still. But I want you to take me back — to take me back — to take me back —"

Her voice trailed away in an agonized wail, and she covered her face in her hands. A deep and solemn stillness reigned in the room as if beside the two, the tall man and the prostrate woman, another figure stood, mute, noiseless, yet omnipotent. The sounds in the street seemed like vague, far-off echoes that

THE STOOP OF THE SOUL

might have wandered down from some distant planet, so remote were they from the intensity of that moment, which held for him a profoundly ethical meaning.

For a moment he stood looking down at her, not moving a muscle. Presently he took a step forward, and as he did so his features became less tense, and in place of the rigidity, like a mask, that had kept his face throughout in a sort of frozen calm, because of the supreme effort he was making at self-control, there came the light of a wide and self-obliterating compassion, as he stooped to her.

"I will take you back," he said, very gently, and lifted her to her feet.

CHAPTER XVI

TIME'S WHEEL

ON a certain gray November afternoon Roger came down the steps of one of those narrow, red brick, distinctly urban residences, designed, apparently, as a main purpose, for the destruction of individuality, which one sees in most large cities, and which, in this instance, with its almost boastful air of modest gentility, its steep stone flight, and slender iron railing, formed one of a long row of comfortable but entirely commonplace dwellings on an obscure street in Cincinnati.

Here for nearly three years he had lived, never once setting foot on Kentucky soil, and only in his dreams, like some shipwrecked traveler starved, a-thirst, and dying nearly in sight of his native shore, beholding the lovely land with that deep, unquenchable yearning that the Kentuckian everywhere feels for his state when long absent from it. And here, with the shadow of her dark and terrible past and his own most tragic sorrow ever between them, together, yet infinitely

TIME'S WHEEL

apart, once more he and Marian had attempted their poor semblance of a home.

The arrangement had not turned out the temporary thing she had predicted. The diagnosis of the physicians she had consulted abroad proved to be incorrect. Her physical condition slowly, but surely, had improved, until finally, through the skill of the best physicians procurable and most careful nursing, she was almost a well woman again. And though her beauty never quite returned, some measure of the rare good looks she had had gradually came back to her, and with it many of those pronounced traits of character that on the surface had seemed to vanish with her bloom. But the tigress passion in her had been only sleeping; it was not dead, and with her renewed health it awoke and clamored for its prey.

A new stimulus to existence had been given to her in the discovery that Roger was no longer the pauper he was when, following her own violent inclination, she had left him. The old love of luxury, for the soft, warm places of life and for beautiful, costly things, the desire for social success which had always been dominant in her until she met Waller and succumbed to him, now that she had lost him, again took hold of her; and with all the craftiness which she had displayed in striving to win Roger, and with the same fleshly allurements, once more she sought to be the

THE INVISIBLE BOND

temptress, and to throw her enchantment over him so that, Delilah like, she might rob him of his strength, and thus through him accomplish what she would.

But her efforts had met with a resistance so stern and chilling that even she had drawn back unable to endure the humiliation of his repulse. Adamant against her blandishment, treating her always with a reserve that nothing could break down, he was yet unfailing with regard to everything that could even in the smallest way minister to her comfort; and his courtesy and kindness toward her when with her never faltered. But they could scarcely have been more removed from each other if thousands of leagues had separated them; and in his steadfast attitude, and in her own gradual recognition of the fact that henceforth she was to be a wife only in name, a sense of shame was provoked by her own powerlessness which at first flared into flame and then sullenly smouldered. Her fierce resentment, which at the outset might have been placated at the first signs of yielding, had finally become a settled ill-will which no overture on his part could have altered, had he felt disposed to make it.

The profound pity which she knew he felt for her hurt her even more than if in its place he had given her only scorn. A brother's gentleness, when she wanted a lover's caress; protection merely, when she longed for power; obscurity, when her whole nature

TIME'S WHEEL

cried out for the visible and the conspicuous — these were the things he had given her, and they had filled her only with dissatisfaction, because they were the things she cared little for.

To-day there had come a climax in their relation. She had been thinking of Waller and of the wild frenzy of passion he had aroused in her which she still called love. She was particularly miserable, feeling the need of excitement, and at luncheon she had brought up a subject, half tentatively, but with a recklessness born of desperation, which never before she had dared to touch upon. She suggested that they should return to Lexington. Roger's face suddenly paled. Then he had pushed back his plate and risen from the table, speaking never a word. And a sudden flame of crimson had swept to her brow, and a moment afterward, throwing aside all restraint, she had turned upon him with hot, indignant words, charging him with neglect of her, and bewailing the loneliness and wretchedness of her existence. The utter baldness and vulgarity of the scene, the unexpected outbreak, her defiant disregard of everything relating to her sinful career, filled him with dismay. Hitherto he had been able to keep their intercourse upon a certain dead level to which his own courtliness had given tone. Now he realized that a line had been crossed that would mark the beginning of a painful alteration in their future

THE INVISIBLE BOND

association. Presently he had come back to her and sat down beside her, and for an hour or more he had remained with her, striving in his thorough high breeding to atone for the stab he had given, yet firm against any argument in favor of a less secluded existence for them both.

But she was not to be pacified, and the recollection of the mingling of shame and wrath and stubbornness upon the once beautiful face was something that he took with him as he went down the steps of his house and started toward the business portion of the town.

It was late, but in his preoccupation he was unheeding of his car that dashed past just as he reached the sidewalk. Once before, he recalled, she had hinted her desire for acquaintance, and it had been dimly borne in upon him that she wished to return to the life of the world, and to avail herself of the entrée into society about them which she believed his high position might still have commanded for her, had he not, to her extreme annoyance, thrown off every attempt at sociability on the part of persons he had met, raising about himself a barrier that few had the hardihood to break down. But before she had scarcely more than touched upon the matter, he changed the subject abruptly, and since then she had lacked the courage to bring it up again.

What it was that had roused her to the indelicacy of

TIME'S WHEEL

this last proposal he could only conjecture. For a number of weeks past he had been compelled to take luncheon down town until to-day, and in the press of business he had not been able to give up more than a few moments every evening to her. He had taken an office in Cincinnati, and through the instrumentality of an old lawyer friend of his father's, an opportunity of practicing his profession under conditions peculiarly favorable had opened up to him. He worked almost incessantly, the same undaunted, trustful, grappling spirit of his earlier years coming again to his rescue, and helping him to endure his lot as it had helped him before in the midst of his fiery trials.

He had reached Fourth Street and was hurrying on when a voice spoke at his elbow. He turned and looked into the face of Judith Beverley. She had just emerged from a candy shop and she carried two large boxes under her arm. Something of the discontent he always associated with Judith had vanished from her expression. She was pleased and smiling, and she stood before him in her long brown travelling cloak and quiet hat and veil with a certain elegance that made him think of Mrs. Beverley, as he for the first time discerned a faint likeness between the short, compact figure of the girl and her tall and stately mother.

"How do you do?" she inquired, heartily, holding

THE INVISIBLE BOND

out her hand. "Do you always run over the people you pass on the streets?"

"Not always," he answered, gravely, but smiling, "I usually spare a few."

"You came very near not sparing me," she replied, bluntly. Her keen eyes searched his face, and he flinched a little under her close observation. Through a careful avoidance he seldom met any of his Kentucky friends on the Cincinnati streets, though he knew that they were to be seen there constantly. In the almost three years that had passed since he left Lexington, he had not once come upon Judith. All at once, as a result of her scrutiny, she uttered an abrupt exclamation.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" she asked, quickly. "Have you had an illness?"

He looked away. "No, I have not been ill."

But Judith kept up her investigation. Presently she drew a long, slow breath, and shook her head.

"Well, you certainly look it," she exclaimed, tactlessly, and still unconvinced. "If mama could see you I am sure she would prescribe at once. You know she is always doing that, to my father's great disgust. Did she ever make you poke out your tongue?"

He laughed. "I don't think she ever did."

"Nor tell you to keep quiet while she counted your pulse?"

TIME'S WHEEL

"I begin to think that I was sadly neglected. Is it a special mark of favor?"

Judith's shoulders went up in the old, familiar shrug.

"Oh, no; she dispenses such attentions alike upon the just and the unjust, and I once saw her tenderly pressing the wrist of a complete stranger in a street car — a blear-eyed old man afflicted with rheumatism. You know she has almost as many remedies for human ills written out in that wonderful old book of hers as she has receipts for good things. Papa confided in me in a desperate moment and said she was a perfect quack. But where were you going in such haste?"

"To my office."

"Is anybody waiting for you?"

"I — don't know. Possibly."

"Would you have time to walk to the station with me and carry these things? They are so heavy."

She glanced down at her boxes of candy and he quickly relieved her of them.

"The children, as we call them still, would never forgive me if I came back without an extra large supply. This is to be my last trip," she said as they moved on.

"Have you been here often recently?" he asked, regretting the opening of the sluice-gates of memory through the enforced conversation, but at the same time eager like a hungry dog for the veriest crumb of

THE INVISIBLE BOND

information she might let fall in relation to every one connected with the old life that now seemed daily receding further and further from him. Not once had he heard directly or indirectly from Sibyl. Where the years had been spent, and how, he knew not — always silence, dead and pall-like and impenetrable silence, surrounded her; so that at times a madness of longing would possess him to pierce the weight of blackness that shut her out from him and confined her loveliness. Something in Judith's manner revealed to him that she had a communication of some sort to make to him, and his heart was giving such a succession of wild, rapid, expectant beats as made it difficult for him to talk to her.

"Have you been here often recently?" he repeated, keeping closely to the subject of herself from sheer inability to touch upon anything that might lead up to the one question his whole being ached to ask, yet could not.

Judith grew debonair. She darted a quick, side-long glance at him, and then dropped her eyes. "Oh, quite — quite often."

"Is it for business or pleasure?" he asked.

"Both."

He looked puzzled.

Her figure stiffened slightly, and she held her chin with a sudden haughtiness. The truth was she had

TIME'S WHEEL

found it by no means an easy matter to forgive Roger even after all the years, for not falling in love with her, and she felt that the moment, small as was its triumph, would in a measure reinstate her in a lost dignity.

"I have been here every Saturday for the past three weeks," she said; "I am getting my trousseau. It is to be a lovely one."

Roger turned quickly, with kindly interest.

"So you are going to be married! Who is the lucky fellow, may I ask?"

Judith's dignity increased.

"Mr. Morrison," she said, with the calm satisfaction of one who has waited long, and suffered much, and attained at last; the various gradations, however, by which a young woman who has aimed high and slowly descended in her matrimonial ambitions until a modest little home and a very commonplace little man, the latter being thrown in merely, as it were, seem desirable, being all expressed in her mention of the name of her future husband.

He checked an involuntary expression of surprise, but she caught the amused, wondering look in his eyes.

"Oh, no doubt you are remembering that I called him a chump," she said, with a little nervous laugh, "that evening at Sibyl's cotillion long, long ago. Doesn't it seem an eternity? I didn't know him at all

THE INVISIBLE BOND

then; and his nose was certainly much too big. It is still. But I like him all the same, and I am going to marry him the week before Christmas."

Roger did not answer. That one mention of Sibyl had struck him dumb, and he could say nothing.

"Don't you remember that I called him a chump?" persisted Judith, still laughing, and looking up at him with that curious combination of brusqueness and coquetry which gave her a certain uniqueness of her own. "Don't you remember? You were sitting by mama and me at the favor table. Sibyl —"

"I remember," he cut in, rapidly. "But I understand now that chump was only hyperbole for charming."

They had reached the station, and they went at once down below, where a crowd awaited the calling out of the several trains.

"Oh, I do believe I'm late," cried Judith, looking around.

He took out his watch. "You have three minutes yet, long enough for me to tell you how sincerely I hope you will be happy."

People were surging through the gates. A stentorian voice was calling out unintelligible things in his ears. A sense of utter forlornness was stealing over him, a wild eagerness to learn something — anything — before she should leave him.

TIME'S WHEEL

"Thank you," replied Judith, rather stiffly again. I am — very happy. Good-by."

She put out her hand, and with a little nod and smile took her boxes of candy and turned toward the gate, where a grumpy figure in a slouch hat was motioning with a jerk of the thumb to an uncertain traveler toward the train on the far track.

She looked up at him again. A gleam half of mischief, half of malice, shot into her eyes.

"Weddings seem to be taking place everywhere these days," she said, laughing, with a sudden air of mystery. "Have you heard about Sibyl Fontaine's? But I really must go."

He paled, and with his gaze still upon her she stood smiling back at him over her shoulder, while the man at the gate fumbled with her ticket. Then she passed on through. But once on the outside she looked toward him again, and all at once, still laughing immoderately, she darted back to the iron railing where he stood, and once more her voice, half teasing, half mocking, and wholly torturing sounded in his ears. She pursed up her lips, and held her head on side. Her eyes were dancing.

"Sibyl Fontaine was married to a foreigner with a title and a most unpronounceable name, yesterday, in New York!" she whispered, and was gone.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

It was after seven of the same evening before Roger returned to the unhappy dwelling-place he called his home. He had been tramping the streets for hours, unconscious of everything about him, even the slow sinking of the twilight into darkness, so symbolic of the despair that had come to take the place of that dear glimmering of hope of a far-off day of blessedness, which, in defiance of all circumstances, had sustained him throughout the difficult years; and it was with a sense of utter defeat, a numbness which left him powerless to confront, to battle, to reason, that he went up the steps of the house and on into the narrow hall-way. Under this last blinding gust, the severest, the surest, the very roots of his nature had been up-torn, and lay bare and quivering in the storm that had felled him.

The lower floor was lighted, but in Marian's bedroom above there was absolute blackness, and he concluded that she had dressed for dinner and was waiting somewhere down below. He went on up to his own room, hurriedly made his preparations, and returned. As he came down the stairs a servant passed through the hall, and Roger inquired for her. She was not feeling well the maid informed him, and had given directions just after he left that she was not under any conditions to be disturbed. Something made him turn and retrace his steps.

TIME'S WHEEL

He stood a moment on the landing, deliberating. Not once had he entered that room; yet with his reluctance to do so now there came another feeling — a strange, incomprehensible suspicion that made his heart stand still, and caused him to hesitate to send a servant to her.

He knocked softly on her door. There was no answer. He knocked again, this time louder. There was only silence. He turned the knob and entered. An inky darkness reigned in the room, and he stumbled over a chair in his effort to find the electric light. But if she were there she took no notice of the noise he was making. He called to her as he groped his way about the room. There came no reply. At length he found a match on a little silver candlestick and struck it, discovering the electric chandelier in the same instant. He quickly turned on a light and looked about him.

The bed-chamber appeared to be deserted, the rose-colored silken coverlet on the bed being heaped up in such a way as to give the impression of having been hastily thrust aside by some one who had but recently been lying beneath it. Yet he did not believe the room to be empty. He stood perfectly still, a cold perspiration gathering on his brow.

A peculiar sensation was beginning to steal over him, a dizziness of the brain.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

All at once he pulled himself together and crossed the room to the bedside.

"Marian," he said in a firm, distinct tone, "Marian!"

The spread was drawn up about her shoulders, but the outline of her form was plainly visible to him now, and also her loose coil of red-brown hair against the lace of her soft silk dressing-gown. With that strange accuracy with which detail impresses itself upon one in such moments he noticed that the gown was pale blue. On the table by her side there was a tiny box, and near it a glass of water. He did not touch the box, but suddenly with a deepening suspicion he drew back the coverlet and looked at her.

A low cry of horror broke from him. She was lying on one side, her head pressed down against the pillow, one hand tightly grasping a little jeweled locket out of which a man's face looked — the face of Francis Waller.

Transfixed he stood staring at her, comprehending in one vivid flash of realization the terrible meaning of her aspect, and of this shameless, almost defiant avowal of something that, hitherto, she had guarded from him as a tigress guards her young; so that of all men Waller was the last whom he would ever have found it possible to suspect. He reached down and touched her hand. It was rigid and cold in death. Then he quickly turned to the tiny box on the table.

It was labeled Morphine.

CHAPTER XVII

THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES

ONE night a month later Roger returned to Lexington.

It was Christmas Eve, such a Christmas Eve as had been the delight of his boyhood, with a keen, strong wind asweep, a fall of snow three feet deep, and a temperature sufficiently below the freezing point to give promise of excellent skating on the morrow. How he had loved to skate! That delicious bracing and balancing of oneself in the biting, wintry air, that splendid sense of health and ease and good-humor, that supreme confidence in one's own powers of skill and of endurance that used to set his blood a-tingling with something of the rapture that the eagle feels as he spreads his wings and soars — *what* it had all meant to him! So much more, it seemed now on looking back to it, than the mere amusement alone. For it had implied the exhilaration of resistance, of exertion, of the capacity of throwing one's whole being into the thing that absorbs one and drawing from it

THE INVISIBLE BOND

the last atom of enjoyment it contains, just as later on he was destined to throw his whole soul into his work, and to draw from it the inspiration that makes for a higher ideal of life.

The lawn in front of the old Hart residence was a white and glittering expanse beneath the newly-risen moon, and unbroken save for a series of footprints, supplemented here and there by the irregular tracks of a dog, leading from the smaller of the two gateways along the narrow path that wound under the ghostly trees up to the deserted house. Evidently Uncle Lish and his favorite among the setters were the sole itinerants that had gone that way all day; and in contrast with the distant sounds of merrymaking going on in the heart of the town, where, amid the blare of tin horns, crowds of loafers and little street urchins were shrieking their delight in bonfires and sky-rockets and Roman candles, the solemn stillness that brooded over the spot produced an impression not unlike that awakened by the sight of a churchyard in the midst of a noisy city square. The two old negroes left in charge of the place as caretakers scarcely gave to it the look of being inhabited, and but for a little thin trail of smoke that presently Roger discerned ascending from the extreme rear portion of the building he might have even doubted their faithfulness.

He had sent no word to tell them to expect him, and

THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES

it was with a sense of utter loneliness and desolation that he stood a moment on the outside of the gate and delayed to lift the latch. The difference between this home-coming and the one he had dreamed of, glorified by the welcome of the woman he loved! He had pictured it all to himself so many times, and last night he had heard almost as an actuality the low sweet sound of her laughter, as he beheld her standing beside him, so that he awoke to the stark misery of his loss, feeling as if he had one instant entered paradise only the next to be thrust down to hell. How he had loved her — loved her still! The bitter blame that a man might have had under such conditions had not come to poison his devotion. He did not question — he did not even try to understand. He had made no further inquiry of any one; for as yet his wound was too new and too deep to bear a careless handling, and the restraint that he had been compelled to put upon himself that afternoon with Judith Beverley, when hoping to obtain some sort of information from her, was an agony that there seemed no need to make a repetition of, in view of the simple, crushing fact. He had lost her! How or why — what mattered it? Some day when his mind had recovered a little from that last staggering blow, and from the tragedy of Marian's death following hard upon it, some day, perhaps, he would wish to know

THE INVISIBLE BOND

everything that now he shrank from. But not yet, not yet.

As he turned into the yard, for the first time he looked in the direction of the judge's home. He had been keeping his eyes resolutely away, but a sense of kinship with his friend through a common loneliness made him think of him with peculiar sympathy on this night when of all others the heart cries out for human contact, the hand clasp with its kind, so that one may be a part of that circle formed by the Christ idea which makes for the solidarity of humanity. To-night in his isolation he felt outside the circle.

All at once he gave a start of surprise. The house presented a very different aspect from what he had expected. Instead of the dark and solitary abode he had thought to see, with only the student's lamp in the library and a single burner in the front hall, he beheld a Christmas cheerfulness that gleamed from every window, and shone softly across the snow, as if the festival were being kept with a special emphasis within. For an instant his heart stood still. In all his torturing imaginings it had not once occurred to him that Sibyl might be in Kentucky. He had thought of her as far, far away, always. That she was here, as seemed more than probable, within a few yards of him, here, where they had loved each other so profoundly and so despairingly, here with the man who was now her

THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES

husband, was a realization that had come upon him so suddenly as completely to unnerve him, and he stood trembling as in an ague, and unable to go on.

He scarcely knew how long he stood there, but after a while he found himself moving quickly forward, regardless of the vague outline of a path made by Uncle Lish's clumsy shoes and the light prints of the dog, and aiming with a sort of desperation for his own doorway. Though he kept his gaze on the ground he could still see that brightly lighted building, and his eyeballs burned as from a painful glare. The front steps were banked with snow, but he strode up them, and with an odd sense of repetition, yet of strangeness, reached down in his pocket for the latchkey, and opened the door.

He moved a step or two into the hall, but he forbore to turn on a light, some instinct newly aroused in him making the heavy gloom that pervaded the place preferable in that moment; and recalling the position of the furniture, he slowly groped his way along the wall and reached the doorway at the far end that led out upon the porch. It was locked, but on the inside, and with the dimly unpleasant consciousness that he was prowling like a burglar about his own premises at the risk of frightening his old servants out of their wits, he went down the steps of the porch and made his way toward the kitchen in the ell.

THE INVISIBLE BOND

There was a little strip of dotted muslin at the window neatly tied to one side, and within, sitting beside a table in a long white apron and carefully stirring something in a huge bowl which she held in her lap, he saw the comfortable form and bland countenance of Aunt Daphne, her smooth, round face shining like polished ebony in the glare of the electric light. She was singing in a disjointed, preoccupied fashion one of the weird plantation melodies of her youth, and as the sound floated out to him Roger listened in spite of his own wretchedness, wondering how anything so unutterably plaintive and heart-broken could be expressive of the sunny contentment that rested upon the old woman's features. But experience had taught him that Aunt Daphne was always at her happiest when she sang that song, and that she was harking backward to a time that she never grew weary of telling of — the time when the colonel was young and life on the great country place was an unbroken round of feasting and gaiety, presided over by the stateliness of "Ole Marster" and "Ole Miss," whose gracious elegance she sought to make alive again by means of the quaint bows and curtsies with which she undertook to describe them.

Presently Roger moved toward the door and tried to turn the knob. The door was locked, and he knocked softly. There was an abrupt pause within

THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES

and a stillness as of one listening. Then the stirring began again and with it a low muttering.

"Ef airy one of dem low-lifted tramps comes a-knockin' at dat doo' I knows what I gwine do to 'em — I knows," said the voice with a chuckle. "De water in dat tea-kittle bilin' hot. Hit sho ain' good foh de health of tramps, but I ain' gwine stan' no foolin' ef hit is Christmas Eve."

"Won't you let me in, Aunt Daphne?" called Roger, meekly; "I am not a tramp."

There was a smothered ejaculation, and the bowl was quickly deposited on the table. Then there was a ponderous movement across the room and the door was flung open.

"Bless Gawd, ef thar ain' Miss Sophie's chile out thar in de snow, an' I done took him foh one of dese yere low-down critters what goes 'roun' beggin' a meal o' victuals caze dey too lazy to wuk!"

As Roger entered the kitchen she stood with her hands folded at her waist, making a series of curious little dips before him intended to convey her most humble apologies.

"Honey," she said, "I reckon you'll have to 'cuse me dis time. I ain' nuver had no use foh de poo' white trash. De cun'l he lak 'em better'n he did de half-strainers, an' I is seen him lif' he hat an' step aside foh a ole woman wid a shawl on an' a basket,

THE INVISIBLE BOND

same ez she wuz a queen. Hit's de way wid de quality; but dey too onery foh me, an' de tramps is comin' heah *all* de time."

She pushed a chair for him up in front of the stove and then began vigorously to throw on more coal.

"Is you most froze?" she inquired, anxiously. "Huccome you come back lak dis, 'thout sendin' word to me an' Lish?" Then before Roger could answer she gave a quick, peering glance into his face.

"Gawd!" she cried, "ef you don' look lak you been daid an' buried an' den dug up." But she said no more. That he would not wish to touch upon his life with his wife and her death, she seemed to realize by means of a fine intuition.

Roger looked away, his eyes taking in the appointments of the well-ordered kitchen, the polished range, the glittering array of pans on the wall, and the familiar system and neatness and coziness of it all, and presently his glance returned to the old woman still standing respectfully by his side.

"I have not been ill; don't bother about me, Aunt Daphne," he said, "and go on with what you were doing. I will sit here by your fire and talk to you for a while. How have you been, and how is Uncle Lish?"

The old woman took a cake mold down from the wall, washed and wiped it, and began to pour into it the

THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES

contents of the earthen bowl. She threw him a playful glance over her shoulder.

"Seem lak I git peerter an' spryer all de time," she observed, "but Lish, he is poo'ly, thank Gawd. He all crippled up wid rheumatiz."

"Where is he?" asked Roger, understanding thoroughly that the apparent heartlessness existed only in manner and in words.

"He up sta'hs in baid, soun' a-sleep, I specs, by dis time. I gwine sit up all night wid dis black cake. I is made sixteen, black an' yalleh, an' I done sole 'em all. Dis las' one ain' foh sale. Hit's a Christmas gif' foh Miss Sibyl. Miss Sibyl moghty good to me, an' I is makin' dis cake foh her, an' I gwine tek it over to her to-morreh, an' I gwine ketch her Christmas gif' fo' she knows it. Uu-um! Ain' she sweet an' pretty! Dey is havin' a party over thar to-night — leastways her pa is, an' Miss Sibyl come in an' shuk han's wid all de gemmen, an' she talk a lil while, an' den she come out, trailin' her skirts an' laughin'. She got on a light blue silk an' a rose in her hyah."

"When — when did she come back?" asked Roger, unsteadily.

The old negress turned a blank countenance upon him.

"Whar she been?" she demanded in surprise.

"I was told that she had been to New York,"

THE INVISIBLE BOND

he replied, the room suddenly whirling before his eyes.

Aunt Daphne shook her head.

"She ain' been to no New York," she declared, positively.

Roger was unable to speak for a moment, and the old woman, noting his pallor, said, suddenly:

"Honey, is you hongry? Lemme make you a cup of tea, an' bring you some victuals outen de pantry."

"I had something down town, Aunt Daphne; I don't want anything more. Tell me about — the judge. How is he?"

"De judge right smart. Miss Sibyl all de time takin' keer of him. She ain' lef' him oncet sence you been away. I say, 'Honey, how de Judge gwine do whin you git mahied?' And she say, 'Aunt Daphne, I ain' nuver gwine git mahied; I jes gwine be ole maid. Don' you think I'll make a nice old maid?' An' den she laugh an' look sweeter'n a peach, an' say, 'Maybe I won' be a ole maid; maybe de fairy prince come arter me wid de love-light in he eyes, an' den, whin he comes, he'll know I is been a-waitin' an' a-waitin', caze I don' wan' nobody but him.'"

Roger had suddenly risen. A mist had gathered before his eyes, and he rested one trembling hand on the back of his chair to steady himself. His heart was

THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES

beating tumultuously, but with a great effort he controlled his voice and spoke.

"Aunt Daphne," he said, quickly, "do you think it would be possible for you to speak to her for a moment?"

"In course I kin speak to her."

"Will you get her cloak and overshoes, and then tell her that I am waiting by the bench in the garden?"

The old negress threw back her head, and broke into a laugh that revealed nearly all of her white, strong teeth, as she snatched up a heavy gray shawl from a hook in the corner. A twinkle of understanding shone for an instant in her eyes, flickered, and fled, as with a certain wily diplomacy that showed her quite capable of managing the situation without appearing to suspect its import, she remarked, blandly:

"I gwine fetch her, caze hit's time she gittin' a bre'f of fresh a'r." And then, as quietly as if the command he had given were quite the most natural thing in the world, she threw the shawl over her head, and slipped out into the night.

The old garden lay sleeping under the calm splendor of the full-orbed moon, tucked beneath a fleecy coverlet a-gleam with iridescent stars and overhung by delicate draperies that softly clung about tree and bush and flower. The snow had been shoveled from

THE INVISIBLE BOND

the little path that led toward the bench that held for Roger such intimate and thrilling associations; and it was with a sudden leap of the heart that he noted the circumstances and wondered if the place had not become to her after he had left her a sort of shrine where, though striving never to lose sight of the fact that they were separated from each other in the flesh by vows which were restraining, the spiritual part of her had gone out in perfect communion with the spiritual part of himself that had never been wedded, and felt itself mated without sin to his soul. For his masculine vision had enlarged. And added to the full comprehension of the meaning of the duality of human existence, the union of the man and the woman in the complete sanctity of a healthful humanness and a sound spirituality, which had come to him through experience, there had broken upon him also the realization of the awful isolation that a man's being may discover in the human relation based merely upon sense, and of the exquisite oneness which is attained when all the parts of his nature are answered to.

The stillness of a sanctuary was all about him, a sanctuary lit by moonbeams and soft reflected light, that seemed but a symbol of the Eternal Purity. Only once there was a sound in the distance, and Roger turned eagerly. The glass door at the end of the hall had opened, and old Daphne, looking neither to right

THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES

nor to left, came down the steps and disappeared a moment afterward, passing through the little gateway and on into her own precincts.

He began to pace up and down the path. How the moments dragged! From time to time he paused and would glance appealingly in the direction of the brightly lighted building, which, such a little while before, had filled him with so blinding a sense of pain. The reaction had come so quickly and so unexpectedly that his brain was still reeling as under an intoxication. He was unconscious of the cold, for his heart was glowing with the fire of love, and every wild beat was only bringing her nearer and nearer.

He walked over to the bench and stood looking down upon it, hearing again the sigh of the summer wind in the branches overhead, thrilling again under the sound of her voice, and realizing every little detail of the picture that had forever stamped itself upon his memory in relation to that day when together they had read the old tale of Aucassin and Nicolette, and knew that they loved with a love that was even mightier than that of those dear provençal lovers of the long ago.

Perhaps, like Aucassin on the day when he went into battle, he was dreaming so absorbingly that he lost all sense of relation to anything about him, or she had come so softly that there was not even a rustle of her garments to tell of her approach. He only knew

THE INVISIBLE BOND

that suddenly he looked up and she was there beside him, straight and beautiful in her long dark cloak, and with the light of an eternal devotion shining in her eyes.

For one long, soul-speaking, soul-embracing instant each looked into the face of the other, and then silently he reached out his arms to her, and in silence she came to him. A moment passed, yet neither spoke, nor stirred; and with a finer communication than any speech, spirit answered to spirit as their lips met.

From the house there came the music of harpists playing softly. She raised her head.

"I would have come sooner," she said, just as if all deeper things had been gone over between them and as if they had never really been separated for even a day, "but they," with a nod toward the house, "were about to go in to dinner, and for a few moments I was needed. Father is having some of his old friends this evening, a whole host of them. Dearest, did the time seem long?"

"I thought you would never come!" he cried, passionately.

"But it was only five minutes."

"It was five hours."

All at once, still holding her close to him, with his left hand he drew her face nearer and looked down deep into her eyes. A sudden rush of bitter, torturing

THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES

recollection swept him. "And she told me — she told me that you were married — *you!* God, how does a man bear some things!"

She drew back in actual alarm.

"She? — Who — What do you mean?" she asked, wonderingly.

"Judith Beverley."

She stood watching him, aghast at the hollow misery that had all at once leaped into his eyes at the bare mention of something that she was all in ignorance of. For a moment she could not speak.

"What did Judith tell you?" she inquired, at length, controlling voice and manner, and seeking to calm him by her own quietude.

"She told me that you were married in New York to a 'foreigner with a title and a most unpronounceable name.' Those were her own devilish words."

She moved a step or two away from him.

"And you believed her?" she asked, coldly.

"I believed her. Only a fiend would have been capable of inflicting such anguish. I did not doubt her."

"But you doubted me."

"Never. I knew that nothing, nothing on this earth, and nothing in Heaven or Hell, could ever separate us."

"Yet you believed what Judith told you."

He was silent, and she said, in a voice that had

THE INVISIBLE BOND

grown strangely sad and listless, "It was my cousin, Sibyl Fontaine, who was married in New York to the foreigner with the title and the most unpronounceable name."

He started. The cruel levity on Judith Beverley's silly features, her uncontrollable mirth, and her teasing innuendo, how plain it had all become to him! He looked quickly into Sibyl's face. Her eyes were down-cast. With a sudden, sharp misgiving he held out his arms again to her. She did not stir.

"Oh, forgive me!" he cried. "You can never know what I have suffered."

There was the ring of a wild apprehension in his voice.

She slowly turned and looked at him, at the marks of agony traced deep upon the beloved face, and suddenly her heart melted. With a little sigh she came back to him. "Poor dear!" was all she said, as with both her hands she drew his face down to her.

How ill and wretched and unnerved he was she had never until that instant fully realized, and her heart was not only full of forgiveness but of womanly fears for him. Under the pretence of being unwilling to remain longer on her own account she sought to bring him in out of the cold.

"Come, dear, you must take me in now, else you

THE APRIL'S IN HER EYES

will find yourself making love to an ice-maiden, instead of a woman of flesh and blood."

He wrapped her cloak closer about her, and as he did it a scene came before his eyes, and he saw her standing in the door of the Judge's library with a great spray of frozen blossoms in her hands, her lovely face looking forth from the flowers, sad as if she were the very goddess of spring, sorrowing for all her little dead children.

"An ice-maiden, is she?" he said, quickly, as a sudden thrill of passionate possession shook him. "But 'the April's in her eyes,' and my love —" he laughed softly — "my love is warm."

She pressed nearer to him. "Say the rest of it," she demanded, with a catch like a sob in her voice.

"I can't; I don't know any more."

Once more she drew his face down to her, and he felt her tears wetting his cheek.

"'It is love's spring,'" she quoted, low under her breath. And even as she spoke she felt the quick tightening of the muscles in the arm that held her, the sudden joyful, overleaping response with which his whole being awoke to the meaning of her words, as simultaneously, and in an awed silence, they turned and together started up the narrow path.

THE END



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 132 172 8

